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Mercredi
10 mai 2017

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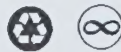
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 10 May 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 10 mai 2017

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 127, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes, when the Bill is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet on Monday, May 15, 2017, from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and

That the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 127:

—Notice of public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire; and

—That the deadline for requests to appear be 5 p.m. on Monday, May 15, 2017; and

—That witnesses be scheduled to appear before the committee on a first-come, first-served basis; and

—That each witness will receive up to five minutes for their presentation, followed by nine minutes for questions from committee members; and

—That the deadline for written submissions be 7 p.m. on Monday, May 15, 2017; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 7 p.m. on Monday, May 15, 2017; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Tuesday, May 16, 2017, from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That on Tuesday, May 16, 2017, at 9:30 a.m., those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the Committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question neces-

sary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto, one 20-minute waiting period pursuant to standing order 129(a) being permitted; and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Tuesday, May 16, 2017; and

That in the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called that same day; and

That when the order for third reading of the bill is called, 30 minutes of debate shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties; and

That at the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the votes on second and third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi has moved government notice of motion number 10.

Mr. Naqvi.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke Centre. Before I turn it over to him, I just wanted to say that this is important legislation, as you know, implementing the government's budget bill, the government's agenda and, particularly, introducing OHIP+ pharmacare, a universal pharmacare program for our children and youth, ensuring that we are building Ontario up and building an Ontario which is stronger and healthier.

I'm confident that the member from Etobicoke Centre, who worked very hard on this bill and on this budget, along with the Minister of Finance, will share with us why this motion is important and why we need to move forward with the passage of Bill 127.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is aware that it is a rotation and that we'll come to the member from Etobicoke Centre on full rotation.

Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: Good morning. Let's be clear as to why we're here this morning debating what we're debat-

ing. This government couldn't manage a two-car funeral, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're here. They're forcing through their budget in a very limited amount of time. They don't want us talking about the budget because there were a lot of magic beans that were used in this budget. There was a lot of masking of facts and smoke and mirrors that were used in this budget that they don't want us to talk about, and they've done a very, very poor job on planning how it's going to make its way through this House. That's why we're faced with the motion we're faced with today.

This is the sixth budget that I've debated in this Legislature. Actually, that's not true. I've debated five. We've had six budgets presented in the Legislature since I've been here in 2011, but one of them we didn't get to debate because an election was called, so we debated it when it was presented again in 2014.

What we're dealing with here today is a time allocation motion on the budget bill, which is an omnibus piece of legislation that amends 33 different schedules—or, at least, there are 33 schedules in this budget bill today. When you listen to what the House leader just described, we're talking about a very, very limited scope of debate on all of these different schedules that are in the budget bill this year.

So we're here this morning debating one of the most, if not the most, restrictive time allocations that I've seen in my six years in the House: an afternoon for committee hearings and a morning for clause-by-clause on a budget?

This bill has 33 schedules and was introduced just a couple of weeks ago by the finance minister. The government here is stating nothing short of the fact that it would prefer members not do their jobs. It would prefer us not to take a closer look at the budget that was presented. Keep in mind, this is a government that at times has had to offer dozens of amendments on its own government bills, its own legislation, because they've messed up serious technical details involved with the implementation.

On a massive omnibus piece of legislation, the government believes 30 minutes of debate at third reading is sufficient—not just 30 minutes per party; 30 minutes shared in the Legislature, 30 minutes at third reading to debate the budget for the province of Ontario. It's unbelievable. People should be outraged, but they don't really know what's going on, because for some this is inside baseball. Really, it's amateur hour on behalf of the government of Ontario, because they can't get their House in order. That has been proven time and time again over the last 14 years that they've been in power. They've messed up everything.

You look at the health care system in the province of Ontario and the mess we're in there. You look at our education system and the mess we're in there, closing schools all across the province. The most school closures anywhere ever are happening right here in Ontario. You look at our energy sector, and we could go on forever there about the mess they've made on our electricity system and the prices that we're paying.

I digress.

As I said earlier, the bill has 33 schedules, and the government is saying that it requires less than one minute per schedule at third reading. It's unbelievable. That should tell you everything you need to know about how the government views the voters who send us here to Queen's Park to debate on their behalf.

The stated rationale for doing this, by the way, is that the government knew that in order to introduce a different piece of legislation, the government had to pass the budget first. So debate in this House is left to suffer, public scrutiny is left to suffer, because the government House leader's office and the Premier's office don't know how to manage the House schedule. We know they don't know how to manage the province's finances. That has been very clear. They're playing all kinds of games with the numbers to make it appear as if they have a balanced budget in Ontario, when I think every financial expert out there knows that they haven't done that. Debate in this House suffers as a result.

0910

As a general rule, budgets are supposed to be financial plans for the government. We're not only supposed to know where the money is coming from, but we're also supposed to know where it's being spent and how much of it is being spent there. On that score, the budget is surprisingly light on details as it pertains to the major-ticket items that are supposedly included in it. You can pretty well point to something that the government likes in this budget, and there's a detail that comes up instantly that highlights something that the government left out.

You can start with the centrepiece of this Liberal budget, the pharmacare, if you want. It's the only thing that every Liberal went out and talked about the day after the budget—because I think nobody took them seriously when they told them that it was a balanced budget when clearly it wasn't a balanced budget; it was an artificial balance. It's the centrepiece of this budget, according to the government. But what was missing in the budget book? What was missing in the documents? The actual price of the program. They say that it will cost the treasury \$465 million every year, and they say that because it's not actually written anywhere in the budget. If you wanted to find that out in the lock-up, you had to ask a bureaucrat to get the information you were looking for.

I want you to imagine something: A government comes out with a signature social program expansion—the one talking point that they wanted all government caucus members to go out and pump up in the immediate wake of the budget—and the cost of it isn't in the province's central financial document, which is either an incredible omission on the part of the Ministry of Finance, or it's because the government doesn't actually know how much the program is going to cost.

Let's examine what information has been publicly available by the government and its ministers.

The government is saying that the cost of the program is \$465 million. That's to cover everyone under the age of 25 through the existing Ontario drug benefit for the

entire prescription schedule. There are approximately four million people under the age of 25, give or take, according to the relevant minister. So the simplest thing to do would be to take the \$465 million that the government says that the program costs and divide it by the four million eligible, and you'd get a per person cost for the program. In this case, it's about \$116 per person.

Government members will point out that there are a lot of people under 25 who don't use any pharmaceuticals, and that's true. That could be an explanation for why the government's program, which covers significantly more drugs, costs roughly the same as the program of the third party, which covers significantly more people. Or you can think that both of them just pulled numbers out of the clear blue sky, which is probably what happened. Or you can think that—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: No, we did math.

Mr. Todd Smith: I want to move on to a couple of figures from CAMH to combat the point being made that young people use fewer pharmaceuticals than their more experienced counterparts.

By the time a Canadian hits 40—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Are we finished yelling across the aisles at each other now? I hope so.

Continue.

Mr. Todd Smith: By the time a Canadian hits 40—one in two have or will have had a mental health concern. Some 70% of mental health problems have their onset during adolescence—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Essex would like to say something?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You won 50 bucks. You should be happy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): That's right. I don't know who I bet, though.

Go ahead.

Mr. Todd Smith: People aged 15 to 24 are more likely to experience a mental health concern or substance abuse concern than any other age group. Some 34% of Ontario high schoolers indicate a moderate to serious level of psychological distress. Finally, according to Children's Mental Health Ontario, one in five youth will experience some form of mental health problem.

I don't know the degree to which pharmaceutical care is going to aid in improving these statistics, but I do know that the formulary contains hundreds of drugs to deal with issues of the central nervous system. You can find them all online at the ministry website.

I respectfully submit that any belief that this program won't cost that much because we're dealing with a part of the population that tends to be more physically resilient ignores the current reality of Ontario youth. You may not pay for the same medications that are currently being used by Ontario drug benefit recipients, but that doesn't mean you'll end up paying for less of them.

For that cost not to be itemized in the province's fiscal plan, which we're being asked to vote on, is malpractice

on the part of the finance minister. A five-minute Google search gives you considerable reason to doubt the figure that this government has put on its signature proposal in the budget.

I also want to point out that the Minister of Finance stated on The Agenda that the reason that he picked 25 as the cut-off age is because it was a round number. I'm not sure how many bureaucrats work in the Ministry of Finance—I know this government spends millions on private sector consultants, as though working in the PricewaterhouseCoopers building made you an endangered species—but none of them could come up with a better reason for 24 or 25 being the cut-off than it just happened to be a round number, so that's encouraging as well.

Let's turn to the actual fiscal plan of the province, because this stuff tells us a lot about money coming and money going out of the government. According to the Ministry of Finance, home resales were up 9.7% last year and the average price was up 22.3% province-wide. Between real estate, construction, and banking and finance, a full 30% of the Ontario economy is tied up directly or indirectly in a hot housing market. Real estate, rental and leasing was a leading sector in real GDP growth in the province last year.

These are numbers that the government confirmed in the budget when it admitted that it took in hundreds of millions of dollars in additional land transfer tax revenue last year. It's a bubble so big you could leave Willy Wonka's factory in it.

Last year, the province's Environmental Commissioner said, "Land use planning and development is really Ontario's oil sands." I'm saying all of this to prove a point this morning. When the commodity price on oil hit the skids, it blew a multi-billion-dollar hole through the middle of that province's books. Alberta is still experiencing record unemployment levels.

Leveraging the province's fiscal state on a single sector of the economy, which the Ontario government has very much done in this budget when it comes to the real estate sector, is a dangerous proposition for all Ontarians. The finance minister and the Minister of Economic Development get up and they crow about the state of the province's economy daily, but the reality is that our books are founded on quicksand, not rock.

It's a perfect storm of record-low interest rates for a decade, a strong American economy and a weak dollar. If you remove a single factor there, this all comes down really fast. If you have interest rates like we did in the 1990s, you'll pull a lot of demand out of the housing market and you'll end up with a lot of house-poor people who bought when the rates were really low, and that 30% of the economy tied into the real estate sector starts to face a major stress test. The prosperity the government talks about is nothing more than a mirage. We aren't more productive. We're just printing cheap money, and we have been for a long time.

If I could move on from housing to energy, as the energy critic, I'd like to take a couple of issues close to

my portfolio and expose the government's mismanagement when it to the province's asset sales strategy. In this budget, the government counted over \$2 billion in increased asset sales revenue from two years ago. Roughly 60% of that increase is the sale of Hydro One shares. The rest is cobbled together from a number of real estate transactions, including the sale of Ontario Power Generation headquarters just south of Queen's Park, at College and University; the Seaton and Lakeview lands, and a few other transactions that took place as well.

The Hydro One sale is resoundingly unpopular in this House and across the province. We all know that. Opposition members found out from talking to people. The cabinet found out from talking to their pollster David Herle, but at least we can all agree on the fact that sale of Hydro One is extremely unpopular.

The thing is, you can't balance the budget and call it a balanced budget with the one-time sale of assets. It's an artificial balance because the government isn't dealing with the structural issues in the province of Ontario.

0920

You can only sell Hydro One once, and as we learned late Monday night, the government has already sold off more than 50% of what was once a public power entity in Hydro One. That's done. It's over. You can't count on that money again. You book the money once. Unless you're going to keep selling, you can't double-count the money. You can't do it. Although, as I said earlier, we're dealing with a Liberal government, and it wouldn't be the first time that they double-counted money. We've seen that in budgets year after year.

Just before I finish, I'd like to touch on something that should have been in the budget but wasn't, and that was the government's electricity debt financing scheme. Page 216 of the document reads as follows: "Under PSAS"—the public sector accounting standards—"the results of government business enterprises are required to be reflected on the province's financial statements based on international financial reporting standards (IFRS). As of April 1, 2016, the province will consolidate the results of those two rate-regulated entities as they would be reported under IFRS.... The entities themselves will continue to issue financial statements prepared on a US" generally accepted accounting principles-basis.

For the last 20 years, we've generally held electricity debt in the province at the Ontario Electric Financial Corp., or the OEFC. Now, you may or may not like that, but the reason that we've done that is to make the province accountable for the debt that it incurs there, to make it transparent. What page 216 admits is that part of the reason that the government is about to bury over \$25 billion in principal debt and another \$25 billion in interest at Ontario Power Generation is so that the province doesn't have to account for it; it becomes OPG's problem. Really what it becomes is a problem for electricity customers in the province of Ontario down the road.

This year, 62 days—make that probably 70 days now—after the government announcement of their rate-

scheme plan, we still don't have legislation on how they intend to do that. A \$1-billion equity injection had to be made by the province to kick-start the process, and that was in the budget, but what we didn't see is legislation in the budget, and we still haven't seen legislation in this House, as to how they are going to deal with this \$50 billion in debt that ultimately should be represented in the province's budget, but it's not. It's being hidden over at OPG.

The \$1 billion, according to finance bureaucrats in the lock-up, is reflected in the debt line for the province. So the \$1 billion is there to get the program started; the other \$49 billion is nowhere to be seen, which tells you all you need to know about this scheme. The government could debt-finance rate reduction on its own books. By the admission to public servants, not to mention the Ontario Energy Board's own rate report release of April 20, that's what it's already doing. It's creating the rate reduction mechanism at OPG so that it can get away with keeping it off its balance sheet. Otherwise, we'd see a growing debt at OEFC, and we'd have to move Hydro One sale money over there to finance it.

So we're not seeing where the latest tranche of OPG shares that was sold on Monday is going to end up, but you can imagine that it's probably not going to be used to build infrastructure in the province of Ontario. It's probably going to be used to show that they're trying to balance next year's budget as well. It's not going to where it's intended to be going, and our finance critic has done an outstanding job at explaining where that money is actually going. It's going to trick the people of Ontario into believing that this government is a prudent manager of the province's finances, when clearly it's not doing that. It's not going to pay for infrastructure, as the ministers would like you to believe, as the Ontario Liberal government would like you to believe. It's going to create an artificial balance of the books in the province of Ontario, and it's right there in the budget book if you actually go and take the time to read it.

So, the House is asked to review the government's general fiscal direction. The budget presented lacks substantial costing figures for its central promise. It lacks any kind of recognition of the risks to Ontario's economy. It finances new operating costs on the back of one-time revenue, and it employs accounting tricks to bury a mountain of new debt to avoid immediately servicing it.

We know this government's track record when it comes to health care and education and energy, and I could go on and on and list all of the ministries. The House expects—the House is asked, with 30 minutes of debate shared, to approve all this? Speaker, it simply can't do that, and we won't. Thank you for your time this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, thank you for this opportunity. It's always an honour to rise in this House, but, unfortunately, this is not an honourable motion before us.

The motion to time-allocate debate on the budget reflects this government's increasing irritation with the

democratic process. It sees consultation, it sees openness, as an inconvenience, something that, really, they're not interested in. Seriously, they're not interested in hearing the will of the people.

So it's no wonder that they don't want extended debate or consultations on this budget. For one moment, Speaker, let's look at the impact of this budget on the city of Toronto. The mayor of Toronto was very clear. He said this budget turns its back on the city, and frankly, there are two areas where I think we need to consider this.

The first is that this budget doesn't provide money to help deal with the backlog of repairs at Toronto Community Housing. The city had proposed a one-third, one-third, one-third share between the city, the federal government, and the province to deal with those outstanding problems. The province has no money in the budget to deal with that. What that means is that hundreds, if not thousands, of units will be closed to people who desperately need that affordable housing. This is on top of the millions of dollars that this government has cut from the allocation for housing over the past few years.

If people are worried about homelessness, if people are worried about families who are in desperate circumstances, living in cramped accommodations that they can't afford, turn to this government, because when the crisis came in this city, this government turned its back.

The mayor of Toronto also talked about the abandonment of Toronto's needs for help with mass transit. In particular, the funding is not there to proceed with the relief line. If you're stuck on the Yonge subway and you can't get on a train in the next few years because it's already packed, think of Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal government in this province. They turned their back on Toronto with this budget. They can give whatever protestation they want, but in the end, the city of Toronto will have more homelessness and more gridlock because this budget ignores its real needs. It ignores its real needs.

Speaker, this budget bill before us is supposed to be about the budget. Interestingly, one of the schedules deals with the legislation in Ontario that regulates oil and gas extraction—and there actually is an oil and gas industry in Ontario. It's pretty small, but it's there. Within the last 12 months or so, I introduced a bill to stop fracking or ban fracking in Ontario, and I was told at the time by the relevant minister that there was no need to have such a bill because, in fact, the rules didn't allow it.

Well, the rules are being rewritten in a budget bill. It has nothing to do with this province's expenses. Rules are being rewritten in a way that's not clear. Will in fact this allow fracking in Ontario? That's not certain at this point. It's buried in the bill. It has nothing to do with the budget. It's a very convenient way of putting through something that could be extraordinarily controversial without actually having to come out and say, "We're changing the rules on gas and oil extraction in Ontario. Get ready for people to start injecting fluids into the rocks under your homes in southwestern Ontario. Get ready for that."

Speaker, that alone is a bill that should stand on its own and have full public consultation and full explanation. So it's no surprise that this government doesn't want to have extended consultation, extended debate on this budget.

0930

Speaker, as you're well aware, Ontario is at a tipping point. This province has been made unstable by this government. It's getting harder and harder to build a good life in Ontario. It's getting harder and harder to get ahead. Costs are up, wages are flat and services we count on, like health care and education, are squeezed. If we don't make substantial changes soon—and this budget will not make those changes—we should have real worry about what will happen to our children and their children in the decades to come. Because increasingly, if you're in your 20s and 30s, it is extraordinarily difficult to get a decent job, a long-term job, one that pays enough to actually establish a life. Too many young people in my riding and across Ontario are forced to live with their parents because they can't get the income they need to set up their own lives.

For Ontarians who are waiting for a \$15 minimum wage, this budget is silent. For 85% of Ontarians who want a publicly owned Hydro One, this budget just continues the process of taking the one-time money from the sell-off of an asset that this province built over a century. It takes that one-time money to make the books look good. And that's it; that is the sum total of it.

For millions of Ontarians without drug coverage—this bill, although it introduces a drug plan that will be useful to some people, for millions, they're simply left out. They have no coverage at all. They will have to wait for a change of government to actually get the pharmacare they need.

This budget does not undo the damage that's been caused by the Liberals over their rule of this province since 2003. It's been a long time. A lot of damage has accumulated. This budget will not correct that. In the end, it's the "I'm sorry" budget. It's too late; it's too little. It actually isn't going to deal with the problems that we face.

I want to speak a bit about the impact of this budget on health care. The highlighted announcement is drug coverage for our children and young people. In itself, that's not a bad thing. It's inadequate, but in itself, it's not a bad thing. But we actually need a much broader, bolder, more comprehensive program that covers the millions of people who have no drug benefits at all right now—none. What's to be done for them? Frankly, with this budget, nothing. They're on their own. They are left to deal with problems as best they can—and we pay for that. We pay in the ill health of friends and relatives who can't afford the medications they need, and we pay for it because they will wind up in emergency rooms and in hospital beds, dealing with the consequences of not having had that medication. It will add to our health care costs. It will slow down health care in this province. We will all pay for a lack of action on their part.

Hospital funding will leave many hospitals forced to continue cutting costs. The promised increase of 3% for the sector and a 2% minimum for each hospital is below what's needed, according to the Ontario Hospital Association. The increase is over \$300 million less than what is needed to actually put our hospitals on a sound financial footing.

This government can talk about the money that it's putting in. It's taken so much out, it's put the health care system in such a difficult position that even with what they've put in this budget, the situation in hospitals is going to fall short of what it needs to be, and people will pay for that. People will pay with their health. They'll pay with lost years of life. It will have consequences.

What they've done does not undo the damage of fired nurses, cancelled surgeries and overcrowded emergency rooms. We've had questions raised in the House about people going into hospitals that were so packed, they weren't allowed to get a bed; they were put up in the television room or forced to sleep in the shower or forced to sleep in a hallway. This is not going to correct that. It's not even going to take the major first step that's needed to correct that.

For education, nothing in here to undo the damage to our schools. Speaker, go into schools in your community, go into the schools across this province, and you'll see the results of neglect, of underfunding of capital repairs that make the schools more expensive to operate, and ultimately, more expensive to repair later. If you don't correct a leaking roof now, you're going to have a lot more plaster, drywall and structural issues to deal with later.

Fifteen boards will see special education cuts of \$4.6 million. That alone is an extraordinary thing to be able to say about a budget. The money that we need on child care—it's not there; nothing new to deal with the child care crisis in this province.

It's no surprise to me that this government doesn't want to have a long debate or public consultation on its budget. It would get into deep trouble if people know fully what's on the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the motion by our House leader. I have to say that the reason we are here, the reason we are bringing forward this motion, is frankly because of the procedural tactics that the Progressive Conservatives brought forward. Let's be clear here: This bill has a number of measures that are really important to people in a number of areas, and I'll talk about that in a moment. We want to make sure—I want to make sure—that people have access to those things, those improvements, as soon as possible. We can't afford to delay. It's really unfortunate that the opposition—the PCs—tried to do that.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: You're spinning.

Mr. Yvan Baker: This is just the truth; these are just facts. I hear the heckling from the other side. That's usually a sign that the truth is hurting.

It's unfortunate that the PCs decided to put forward a reasoned amendment. They did that—the record shows that—to delay the debate of this bill, of this critical piece of legislation. We would have had more time for debate had the opposition not done that, so the opposition needs to take responsibility for that. Frankly, while the opposition is playing those procedural games, we're taking action and we're moving forward.

The alternative would be letting the opposition continue with its procedural tactics to delay and drag out this process, as they've done in the past. I won't support that. Those of us on this side won't support that sort of thing.

This is a budget that's designed to help the people of Ontario, and we need to move forward with that. The people of Ontario want us to move forward with that as quickly as possible and get on with the work. The fact that the PCs are using this procedural motion and now arguing that we should move things along is disappointing, to say the least.

The member of the PC caucus who spoke raised a number of issues. I won't address them all, but one of the things that he talked about was the fact that—he suggested that somehow we don't want to look at this bill in detail. If this bill goes to committee, it can be looked at in detail, just as other bills are. Again, if the reasoned amendment hadn't been brought forward by the PCs, then we wouldn't be in this position, so we'd have even more time.

He talked about how, when government bills get brought forward, we, the government, sometimes bring forward many amendments, make many amendments to the bill. How is that a bad thing? That's an indication that the government is listening and trying to make the bill as good as it can possibly be. So to make out that us listening to the people of Ontario who are impacted by legislation and then adjusting to try to make the legislation as strong as possible, I think, is disappointing—and it's a little worrisome that that member wants to be in government and then doesn't want to, presumably, amend legislation that he might bring forward or his government would bring forward. So it's disappointing.

The member opposite talked, again, like the other members of the PC caucus have done over the past several days, about the fact this is—they've argued that this is not truly a balanced budget, because they argue about the cap-and-trade revenues that are being brought in as a result of this budget. Let's be frank about that. The cap-and-trade revenues are not being used to balance the budget. Those revenues are dedicated to specific projects, so there are expenses tied to that revenue. We aren't using the proceeds of asset sales to balance.

If you look in this document and you look back over past fiscal years, every year, governments—Liberal, PC or NDP—are constantly in the process of either buying infrastructure and assets, buying capital or selling capital. When you sell capital, due to the way it's accounted for under the accounting rules, there can be a gain on the sale of an asset. Certainly this year, like in past years, those gains are there. But to suggest that's how we balanced

the budget is to ignore the fact—and I wish the opposition were just honest with people about that.

There's mention of—

Interjections.

0940

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member will withdraw his comment.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I withdraw, Speaker, that I wish the opposition were forthright about that.

The last thing that has been argued is this argument that, because of the difference in accounting treatment in perceived ways to account for pension assets—because the Auditor General disagreed with the initial accounting that had been brought forward by the professional civil servants—somehow we've used inappropriate accounting, which is shocking to me, given that a number of blue-chip accounting experts were brought forward to look at the accounting. They reaffirm that the way we accounted for it this year was the same as we accounted for in the past, and that is the appropriate way to account for things. I just wanted to mention those points because I think that raising those points and suggesting that there's some sort of game being played here is really disappointing.

The other thing I will say is that I want to read from an article that was written about this very topic. This is actually in the *Toronto Sun*, and this was written by David Reevely. He quotes the leader of the PC caucus. He says that this was a question raised by the Leader of the Opposition in question period to the Premier.

“Mr. Speaker, it [has] a \$5-billion operational deficit through cash grabs, pension assets and one-time and unusual revenue,” leader Patrick Brown charged in the Legislature, kicking off question period Monday morning. ‘Will the Premier come clean and admit to the House the budget is not balanced?’”

Then David Reevely goes on to say, “Of course she would not. Because it's a stupid question.” That's what David Reevely writes in the *Toronto Sun*.

It's very clear that this line of attack by the PCs is really, in my view, a sign that they can't find something of substance to criticize so they're telling a story that they're hoping people buy into about how we've somehow falsely balanced the budget.

I have worked in business most of my career. I've advised large companies on how to invest their money. I've studied economics. I've studied accounting. I've studied finance. I know a balanced budget when I see one. This is a balanced budget, and the evidence demonstrates that.

The member from the NDP spoke about a number of items. I have to say that I may disagree with members of the NDP caucus on a number of things, but at least the NDP is debating the issues. They're debating the things that matter to the people of Ontario and they're focusing on the decisions that are being made through this budget that touch the people of Ontario.

There were a few issues that they raised. One is that the member for Toronto–Danforth, I believe, raised the

issue of fracking. Let's be very clear: The changes that are in the budget bill are changes that have nothing to do with fracking. I have to be clear that we are not considering applications for fracking. This government is not doing that.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I just want to make sure that that's clear to all members of this House. This has nothing to do with fracking. Hopefully the member will appreciate that and understand that that's not what it's about.

He said that this government has shortchanged Toronto. Again, I couldn't disagree more. I think the facts show otherwise. I was on *Newstalk 1010* this morning talking about this very issue.

I have to say that when you look at the investments that we have made in the 416, in the city of Toronto—transit is a great example of this. The vast majority of new projects that are being funded in the city of Toronto—the Eglinton Crosstown, the UP Express, the Scarborough subway, SmartTrack, the streetcars—for all of these new projects that are being built in the city of Toronto, the vast majority of that funding is coming from the provincial government. We have supported transit in Toronto like no government ever has in the past. So to suggest that somehow we're shortchanging Toronto is incredibly disappointing to me. Hopefully the member understands that he stands corrected.

The member from the NDP talked about school funding, that there's a lack of school funding. He talked about the need to build more schools and the fact that we need more funding for school boards, to operate the education system.

I have good news for the member opposite. I have good news for the member for Toronto–Danforth. That's exactly what this budget is proposing. This budget is proposing \$16 billion over 10 years for school infrastructure. That's new schools in communities across this province. There is an additional \$6.4 billion over three years for operating funding to fund the education system. I just wanted to make sure that the members were aware of that.

The member talked about how there's a lack of funding for child care. I'm a little surprised. I'm standing here by the minister, who has been working so hard on this file. The government has committed through this budget—and previously, frankly—to 100,000 new child care spaces for the people of Ontario; 24,000, if I'm not mistaken, in the upcoming year.

These are significant investments that are going to make a difference for people and make health care more accessible.

I wanted to make sure that those points stood corrected so that we are basing our discussion on what is in this budget and how it's going to help the people of Ontario.

Speaker, I want to highlight a few other elements of this budget that I think are of fundamental importance.

For me, one of the highlights of this budget is health care. I represent a riding, Etobicoke Centre, which has one of the highest percentages of seniors of any riding in the country, so one of the things that I hear about from members of my community a lot, whether it be from seniors or those folks who are caring for their aging parents or grandparents, is how we can improve our health care system. When I look at this budget, it demonstrates that we're trying to make that a priority. We've got a \$7-billion booster shot for the health care system—the OHIP+ pharmacare program for young people under 25, making over 4,400 prescription drugs free, starting January 1, 2018. There are four million young people under the age of 25 who are going to benefit from this, and they'll know that all those pharmaceutical drugs I just talked about are going to be covered. In addition, this helps families, because very often, especially for the younger children, those prescription drugs are paid for through their parents. This is going to help those families. I'm excited about that measure and how it helps families.

We're going to have \$9 billion over 10 years to build hospitals. That's incredible, when you think about what that will do for access to care in communities across the province. In Etobicoke—and the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore is here, and I know the member for Etobicoke North is very proud of this, too—Etobicoke General Hospital is in the process of being expanded significantly. That's just one example of how communities are going to be benefited by these types of investments. I'm really excited about that.

There's \$5 billion in new money just for operating funds for hospitals. So we're not just building new facilities and infrastructure, but we're also supporting the operation of those facilities.

A few other quick highlights that I think are particularly relevant, especially to my constituents in Etobicoke Centre—the new OSAP. We're now going to have 210,000 young and mature students who are going to get access to free tuition. I think that's really exciting. I had a youth advisory group last night, and the focus of the conversation was financial literacy. One of the issues that came up was the need to think about how to plan for your post-secondary education. The speaker who was at this meeting presented the fact that the new OSAP will do what I just talked about. Some of the young people knew about it, but some of them didn't. They were really excited about that. She talked about how that's going to impact their financial future. It's really exciting.

The Career Kick-Start Strategy will help young people get experience in the field that they're studying. That's incredibly powerful and impactful. As someone who struggled to get his first job coming out of post-secondary, I know what that's like. This will be life-changing for a lot of young people. It's an important step.

The member opposite talked about housing. We've made significant investments in housing across Ontario and in the city of Toronto, so to suggest that we're short-changing Toronto is simply not right.

There are a number of measures to help seniors: the transit tax credit; the investments in long-term care; the dementia strategy, which I'm incredibly excited about. As a PA, Minister Naidoo-Harris, who is sitting next to me, was in charge of travelling the province and consulting with people on the dementia strategy. In fact, she came to my riding, Etobicoke Centre, to hear from my constituents. Those are examples. That dementia strategy is something that we desperately need.

I could go on and on, Speaker.

I'm incredibly proud of this budget, not just because of all these measures that will touch the lives of the people of Ontario, but because we're able to do this because we've balanced the budget. We've balanced the budget as a result of two major factors: one is a strong economy that has grown, that has allowed us to invest; but also because we've taken a solid, sound approach to balancing the budget, finding savings in the budget and doing it in a methodical way—not the slash-and-burn approach of the PCs, not the 100,000-job-cut approach. We went methodically, program by program, through the government's finances to find savings, and I'm incredibly proud of that.

0950

The last thing I would say is that when I see members of the opposition, and I'm referring to the PC Party, stand up and talk about how we need to pay down debt—"You should be paying down debt; we need to reduce the interest rates"—okay. On the other hand, in the same statement, within the same 30 seconds, almost in the same breath, they say, "Oh, but also you need to fund more of this and more of that in my riding." That's hypocritical.

I would ask that the PC Party stand up—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member will withdraw that last comment.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I will withdraw, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I would simply ask the real PC Party to stand up. Are you saying you want us to spend more in those areas, or are you saying you want to cut, slash and burn? Is this the PC Party of Mike Harris, who slashed and burned public services, the party that ran on the 100,000 job cuts in the last election? Is it that PC Party? Or is it a PC Party that's saying, "No, we need to invest in the services that matter to the people of Ontario, like health care, education, social services, child care, and others"?

I'm going to ask once again: Will the real PC Party please stand up?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's always fun—I guess we have some stand-up comics across the aisle here from Etobicoke Centre.

They're trying to make this latest cut-off of debate in the House just another, "Well, it's somebody else's fault." But how do you release a budget the last week of April and expect that when you've only got one month left—plus one day in June, with a week off—you can get it through without doing exactly what they did here?

Last year, they went around with the committee and they issued the budget before the committee even stopped meeting. They issued it in February, if you remember. This year, we started the finance committee early and finished in the middle of January, and they issued the budget in the last week of April, almost May. Then they turn around and try to blame us because we're holding it up. This is just what they do.

They talk about how, yes, we have some projects we'd like to do, but just consider for a second that when they came into power, the revenue the government was collecting, I guess under the former Ernie Eves budget, was about \$65 billion. This government is collecting over \$130 billion, almost \$70 billion more each year. Yes, there's money for projects, but we would not spend the money on scandals like the gas plants. You talk about the UP Express and the over-expenditures this government has done. Everything they do is over budget and delayed. And what do they do? How do they fix that? They usually give the person a bonus. So if you're working for the government and you want to get a bonus, just fail and you get a bonus. That's what this government has done.

There are just so many things you look at here. We talk about the recent school issue with the closures. From a financial point of view, they've got a situation here that's a real mess, and not just in my riding; I share it with Grant Crack, the member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. In Alexandria, we've got five schools that are all less than 50% full. So what are we going to do, close them all? That's the current plan.

The worst thing is that students in my riding who grew up across the road from where I live—we're about an hour south of Alexandria by bus. You go to Alexandria, but there's no school for you, because there's no English public school there. You'd have to go to Laggan, which is another 20 minutes or half an hour by bus. You're talking about almost an hour and a half on the bus to get to the closest English Catholic school, and you're driving by five schools that are all half full. We have to look at what we're doing here.

The promise here is, "Well, close a few more schools and we'll build a new one." Look at the cost of that. If we're going to build infrastructure, let's put some priorities around the infrastructure and decide what we're going to do. Yes, education is very important, but let's bring some of the numbers together. It's not working. When you take a small population and you divide it in four, it doesn't work.

In our area, when you look at the English Catholic school board in just the five counties—Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Prescott and Russell—they have a third of the students. That's unusual in this province. It's probably the only place where that happens, except maybe the city of Ottawa. So you're talking about three boards—the two major boards and the French public board, which is much smaller—sharing the remainder of those students. I think it's something, and the public is demanding that we look at it. But with this budget we have no time to debate because we're looking at—

imagine if you come all of the way to Toronto and you get five minutes to speak in a delegation, one day. How is that a democracy? And what do they do? They turn around and they blame the opposition. Let's look at the timing here.

There are so many problems in this province that we have to look at. Health care: Our only hospital back in Cornwall—it's in the Toronto Star—138% of capacity. We've got people lying on stretchers in hospital hallways, empty offices—anywhere they can find. This is not a one-time occurrence; this happens every spring. Since I've been here, they've asked for more facilities. I go back to my first year here. It was so bad, they had to create 32 spaces over in the old general hospital, and they were bragging that no, it's time—"We have the facilities; we're going to get rid of them. We don't really need them." I guess it was a mistake that they created them.

So we looked into them and when we talked to the CCAC, what we were told was just ludicrous. They were trying to tell us that when they crunched their numbers we had more existing beds today without the 32 than we would need in 2030. So you're sitting there, and I go back, "Well, you know, there are two things here: First of all, the Auditor General said we have the worst wait times in the province, over three years' wait times." And now you're telling me that due to population projections, the population doubles. The seniors population doubles by 2030, so we have double the beds that we actually need.

How can that be? We have the worst record, and double the facilities. So really, by their numbers, half of our beds should be empty. And they said, "Well, that's what our numbers show," but those are the numbers that this government gives out. They just don't make sense. But they're the holders of the information, the holders of the projections. People like to believe what they're hearing from the government, but they're getting tired of it. They're looking at the results; they look at that 138%.

Normally the hospitals wouldn't say anything. I've witnessed them myself, actually, a group of people being warned by the government saying, "If you embarrass us, don't expect—next year will be worse." If you talk to these groups, if you talk to Community Living or you talk to hospitals, they're told that all of the time, so you never hear anything from the hospitals.

After the last election—surprise, surprise—we heard that there have been no increases in the hospital budget for four years. Now, what agency would you not give an increase to for one or two years, and not hear something? Four years in a row, and not a word to the public because they're intimidated; it's an attitude. It's just something in the way that they operate that next year could be worse.

We've asked that question of a group of social services, and that's what they're told. They said that if there's a negative news article, "We'd better know about it the day before, and next year will be worse. So all we do, as hydro rates go up and as wages go up, we silently cut people. That's all we can do." You look in North Bay, where they've cut hundreds of nurses. That's what this government is doing.

They sit here and they now want to cut off debate, because I guess they don't like these stories. There are people who actually sit down and listen to what goes on in the House, and they hear these stories. That's what's happening in our ridings. I look at the talk about some of the things that we've got going here. They have the children's aid bill that they're trying to push. They can't say we're debating it, that we're delaying things, because it's the government that has over 200 amendments in it. We've been waiting since 2012 for a bill. They come through, they finally put it through, and obviously it looks very rushed. They introduced it last year, and now they're trying to push it. The government puts in 200 amendments, almost double what the total opposition put in. Do they not know what's going on here? How could that be?

And everything we do is about cutting off delegations. We tried to get the delegations able to speak for a reasonable amount of time—couldn't get that. They say they want to hear from the public, but just as we hear here, five minutes. Somebody that comes from my riding, if you drive it's about a five-hour drive, maybe five and a half hours depending on the traffic, and you're given five minutes to speak on something that they say is crucial to the province.

1000

What have we not seen so far? We haven't seen legislation on the hydro plan. Will that be rushed through? We've been waiting ever since this House first came back in February, when they finally realized that there's a problem in this province with hydro costs—nothing. We're sitting back here with two legislative weeks left and no legislation. I imagine it will be introduced—maybe it's an election budget. It will say, "Look, if you don't vote for us, we'll never get this legislation through, because we didn't get time to get it through before the session ended." It's mind-boggling what's going on here.

The members say that we're always asking for things. Yes, we are asking for things. We're asking for a better job from this government. A government that takes in that amount of money every year—imagine, \$70 billion a year. Yes, we're asking for \$200 million for a hospital. That's a small amount when you look at the total you're collecting.

But the real question is, where are you spending the \$70 billion? Because the budget was balanced before—I know I'm slightly over my time. I remember when I was newly elected mayor of South Glengarry, the MPP went around the first year of the budget and they spent \$3 billion in the last week of March of that year, 2004. The word was, "The money is flowing, but it's going to come out at the end of March. We can't get the cheques all delivered because we're so busy getting to the photo ops." You can imagine: \$3 billion unbudgeted. They stood here and they said, "Wow, Ernie Eves's budget overspent."

They took power in October. So how much money did they spend? They promised they wouldn't raise taxes; the

first thing was they put the health tax in. But \$3 billion in one week just for transfers to the municipal governments—now, I know they collected that back as they cut funding by \$100 million over the last couple of years, but it's just sad when you look at what's going on. And then we hear that type of talk over there.

Let's stand up for Ontario. Let's be honest with people and let's tell people what we're really spending here. It's a waste of time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate this morning on time allocation. It's a pleasure because it gives me an opportunity to point out that this is a budget, more so than any other budget, I would say, in the history of this government, that needs to be fully, comprehensively debated, unpacked and revealed for what it is. This is definitely an election document, there's no doubt about it—lots of shiny things.

The feedback that I've received from the people of Kitchener–Waterloo, the people who were looking for information on housing, on infrastructure, because we've been waiting for—you remember the bullet train, Mr. Speaker. The bullet train is not coming to town any time soon.

Really, when we look at the major planks of this budget, this government once again ignores the voices of the people of this province, particularly on the Hydro One sell-off. This will remain, I think, one of the greatest betrayals of the people of this province ever in history. For sure, it is the greatest transfer of wealth from the public sector to a public asset, like Hydro One, which generated revenue for health care, housing and education, the core values of the work that we do here at Queen's Park—compromising those revenues in a go-forward position to try to appear as if you are balancing the budget. To the credit of the people of this province, they are not buying it.

There's a major, fundamental difference between where we are right now in 2017 and where we were in 2014. You'll remember going into that first election, Mr. Speaker, the people were angry; there was no doubt about it. They were angry about the gas plants, the \$1.1 billion. They were angry about eHealth and not having a finished product after \$8 billion of investment. They were angry about smart meters, which turned out to be not so smart. They were angry about Ornge and the loss of life and the loss of investment. They were angry about the \$8 billion that Infrastructure Ontario overspent in the great promise of infrastructure investment in the province of Ontario—but Bay Street did very well through those deals.

I think there was genuinely a sense of scandal fatigue. They were cynical; they were disappointed. Those big numbers, like \$1.1 billion—that's a lot of money. But today, they get a hydro bill, and because of the decisions that have been made by this government on the energy file—from fully privatizing green energy in the province of Ontario, signing contracts with independent private

companies at 36 cents per kilowatt hour when the competitive rate was six or eight cents.

When the Auditor General says that to date we have spent \$37 billion more than we ever needed to, to bring in green energy in the province of Ontario—these numbers are so big. But on the energy file, people open their hydro bill every month. They are doing everything—they're doing their laundry in the middle of the night. They've changed their light bulbs. They've retrofitted their house. And still, their hydro bills have gone up 300% in this province. They are mad, and they have every right to be mad.

What does this government do with this budget? They double down on selling off Hydro One. They have not listened to the emotion, to the pain that the people have experienced. We have brought those stories to this Legislature, as is our responsibility to do, about the people who are choosing to heat or eat, about the businesses that are leaving the province of Ontario because the time-of-use high energy costs have pushed them out of this province to go to more competitive jurisdictions.

We have seen the loss of jobs and we've seen the loss of income and we've seen the loss of revenue, quite honestly, to this place. We have seen people make devastating decisions. We have seen the cost of hydro affect health care in the province of Ontario. I will never forget the CEO of a hospital in Windsor saying that his hydro costs for that hospital had gone up \$7 million over the year. He said, "We can't cut anything more. We can't do anything more without hurting people." That was his plea in 2015 to our finance committee, because I used to travel around the province, and it was our responsibility to bring that lived experience back to this place.

But what does this government do? In this budget, they commit to continue to sell off Hydro One. They've lost the majority of the shares. This energy minister is bragging about the fact that the oversight isn't there anymore and that the government doesn't really have the majority to actually do anything about hydro. They have left hydro costs in the province of Ontario up to those who are in their interest—their interest as a private for-profit company is to make money; it isn't to deliver energy at a cost that is acceptable to the people of this province.

I have to tell you, the response after the last tranche sell-off on Monday was swift. Today in the Toronto Sun—I'm going to bring these voices to the Legislature, as is my responsibility to do—Fred Hahn says, "Let me be clear. On behalf of our union, on behalf of the tens of thousands of Ontarians who are part of the Keep Hydro Public Coalition—we will continue to fight against the sale of Hydro One until the Liberals stop this wrong-headed plan, both in the courts and on the ground." And they are in court. The government is in court today fighting the people of this province; it's unbelievable.

Smokey Thomas says, "The sale of Hydro One was always intended to transfer a treasured public asset to private investors for the sole purpose of enriching those investors." True.

Our leader, Andrea Horwath: "By giving up the province's majority stake in Hydro One, Kathleen Wynne is doing even more damage to our hydro system. Her short-sighted sell-off of Hydro One will drive up electricity bills for the residents, businesses and municipalities of our province."

This is this government's track record. This is their legacy: the largest transfer of wealth from the public sector to the private sector. And it is a pattern. It is a pattern on the energy file. It is a pattern on the health care file, with the contracting out and the privatization of health care services in the province of Ontario.

It's interesting, because there's a sense of desperation, truly, right now with this government, because now they are in this fight with the mayor of Toronto. Today in the Globe and Mail—the stakes keep going up, right? The parliamentary assistant to the finance minister can stand up and say, "We've never done more for the city of Toronto." But I'm telling you right now, the mayor of Toronto, John Tory, is going to bat for the people of this city, because the goal of infrastructure and transit investment in this city, which is the economic engine of this province, requires partnership. It requires, as we have proposed, sustainable funding in a rational and a reliable model—one third, one third, one third—and that is what we have made the commitment to.

But today in the Toronto Star: "Mayor John Tory is threatening to stop planning work on a transit project favoured by the province unless Queen's Park commits money to build the relief line subway."

"Speaking at a press conference Tuesday morning in Riverdale, Tory said he was considering blocking progress on the Yonge subway extension, which would extend the TTC's Line 1 (Yonge-University-Spadina) subway into York region."

"The project has the backing of local politicians north of Toronto, including influential Liberal cabinet ministers in Premier Kathleen Wynne's government." This is a line in the sand, but that line keeps getting deeper and deeper, Mr. Speaker.

The article goes on to say, "The mayor said his job was to alleviate crowding on the transit system, 'not to make it worse.'"

"The Yonge Street north extension will only add more passengers to the Yonge Street subway, and without relief, I can't allow that to happen." That's today's Toronto Star article by Ben Spurr, the transportation reporter, who very clearly outlines that this budget does nothing for the city of Toronto to alleviate the pressure. If you travel on the TTC in this city, as I do, redefining yourself as a sardine happens pretty quickly when you get into those cars, Mr. Speaker.

So the mayor has signalled to those members across, the Liberal members from the GTA, from the 905, that this budget does nothing to help them with the social housing backlog or with the maintenance of our current housing stock, which will leave 1,000 units closed in this city. It does nothing to help him plan to alleviate the pressure on the transit system, which gets people to and

from their workplaces, which connects our productivity as a city. And quite honestly, to double down on the sell-off of Hydro One, Mr. Speaker, is unconscionable. The people of this province are mad as hell, and they're not going to take it anymore.

It is not a budget that can be supported. Shame on this government for time-allocating it. Shame on you for limiting the voices of the people of this province so that they don't get to clearly articulate their disappointment and their sense of betrayal from this government, because this budget will not undo the damage of 14 years of Liberal government in Ontario. It's our job to hold you to account, but you are limiting our ability to do so, and that's a sad day for this Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Lorne Coe: Good morning. It's my pleasure to introduce Leigh Arseneau from the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, who operates a practice in the great town of Whitby.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, I'd like to introduce two naturopathic doctors from my riding of Oakville, here with us today to celebrate Naturopathic Medicine Week. Please extend a warm welcome to Dr. Scott Clack from Touchstone and Dr. Nyla Jiwani from the Oakville Naturopathic Wellness Centre in Oakville.

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's my pleasure to be able to welcome Robert Lawrence, Michael Lawrence, Alena Lawrence and Mary Anne Silver to question period today. Rob Lawrence is the best sign guy anybody ever had.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Speaker, I would like to welcome Dr. Katrina Cox and Dr. Stephanie Elliott, who are here from my riding of Durham today with the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to welcome, from my home municipality of South Bruce, Mayor Bob Buckle, Deputy Mayor Mark Goetz, councillors Margie Bates and Mike Niesen, and the administrator/treasurer, Kendra Reinhart.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to welcome the family of one of our page captains today, Claire Le Donne. With us is her father, Dino; mother, Freda; grandmother, Nina; and sisters—who were both former pages—Gabrielle and Bridget. Welcome to Queen's Park.

I also have some other guests here from Hamilton. We have Bruno Farrugia, Jon Ingalls and Karen Coulter. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I am delighted to welcome in the House our good friends from the co-op

sector, les gens du milieu coopératif ce matin : Howard Brown, Laura Casselman, Blake Keidan, Peter Cameron, Luc Morin, Claudette Gleeson, Simone Swail and Julien Geremie, qui sont ici aujourd'hui pour nous parler des coopératives, to talk about the great work they do as a co-operative.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I've been informed that today is the member for Kitchener-Conestoga's birthday, so on behalf of the House I wanted to wish him a very happy birthday.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Speaker, it is my pleasure to welcome my aunt and uncle, Arnold and Marilyn Chiasson, from the great riding of Leeds-Grenville.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'd like to welcome the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors here at Queen's Park.

I also want to introduce Dr. Elvis Ali, who has been a naturopathic doctor in my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt for over 25 years. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, I'd like to introduce all the naturopathic doctors who are here today, including John Wellner, the CEO of the association. Welcome.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Speaker, I'm so delighted to welcome back to Queen's Park from Kitchener Centre former page Ethan McCready-Branch, who is here with his siblings Eli and Brent and his dad, Greg Branch, who did the driving. They came to check out your Lego display.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislative Assembly constituents from my riding of Leeds-Grenville. I want to welcome a naturopathic doctor from the municipality of North Grenville, Shawn Yakimovich.

Since I drive a car from Chiasson Ford, I want to welcome the Chiassons to Queen's Park as well.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I would like to introduce Lisa Priest and other staff members from the Ministry of the Status of Women who are here today. Welcome to question period and welcome to Queen's Park. Great to have you all here today.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: There's a group in the Legislature that will be here soon. It's page Maggie Yurek's class from Monsignor Morrison. The grade 7s are here. Of note, her teacher this year was my grade 8 teacher, Brock Austin. It will be great to see him in the audience when they do show up.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I believe we have one of the naturopathic doctors here today who is a city councillor in Chatham, Brock McGregor. Welcome to Queen's Park, sir.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I too would like to welcome the naturopathic doctors from my riding of Brant, but as a life lesson for the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London, I'd like to introduce my wife. In the Speaker's gallery, Rosemarie is here. Thank you, dear.

I couldn't resist. I'm probably going to pay for that, too. Anyway, I thank all members' visitors for being here.

It is therefore now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PROBATION AND PAROLE SERVICES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Part two of Global TV's Carolyn Jarvis's exposé on Ontario's probation system was just as disturbing and shocking as the first part. I want to be very clear. The member from Ottawa Centre led the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services for two years. He is currently the top legal officer in the province. He can pass the buck to someone who's been on the job less than five months or he can own up to the systemic failure in the system that he oversaw for two years, a failure that was outlined in a scathing Auditor General's report and a follow-up report that showed he didn't solve the disaster in our probation system.

This is his mess. He should take responsibility. My question is to the Premier: Will you fire your Attorney General?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, Mr. Speaker, I will not do that.

Obviously, there are situations that are of great concern to all of us and we are working to deal with those, but in partnership with our police services and justice partners, we've made Ontario one of the safest jurisdictions in North America. That is a testament to the work of our police services. It is a testament to the work of our parole officers, our probation officers.

The reality is that we have people working in this province who have made this one of the safest jurisdictions in Canada. Ontario is also home to six of the 10 safest census metropolitan areas in the country. I am very proud of the work that is done by the people who keep our communities safe. Are there disturbing situations that need to be dealt with? Absolutely.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: I'm sorry, that's not good enough. The reality is our probation officers are saying that our communities aren't safe because this government has not taken this seriously.

Let me give another example. Look at the story from yesterday's report. Kyle McLauchlan was convicted of child luring in 2013. He was sentenced to 18 months in jail and three years of probation. But just two years later, he committed the same crime. This is child luring. According to sources, not once did a probation or police officer check in on him in the community to make sure he was following the rules of his release.

Our probation officers are saying there is a major risk to community safety here. Can you imagine that, someone who's convicted of child luring is out on probation, and there's no one checking up on him? It's ridiculous. It's offensive.

Yesterday, this government laughed when I asked this question. I want them to take it seriously. I want the Premier to understand that our community is at risk. Children are at risk. Will the Premier do the right thing and fire her Attorney General?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say off the top that our Attorney General is one of the strongest men with integrity in this province. He works hard. He works tirelessly for his constituency and for the people of Ontario.

1040

Our Attorney General is in politics because he believes in social justice. He believes that we can make Ontario better. He believes that the rule of law is what we need to follow. He also believes that government has a role to play in putting protections in place for families across the province. He does not believe that filling our jails and vilifying and criminalizing every action of young people, people in our province, is the way to go.

We need to transform our system. He is leading that transformation along with our Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. I understand that it is easier for the Leader of the Opposition—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: I just gave you an example where someone was convicted of child luring and went out and committed the same offence, and your response was to praise your Attorney General for the great job he's doing.

They have dropped the ball. They have failed the test of leadership. Our communities are not safe because they've neglected to make sure that there are no loopholes.

Let me give you an example of what they said yesterday. The Attorney General said it's not him; it's another minister. That minister said, "I wish that there was never an area that we need to improve but it does happen." It does happen? Can you believe that is the response? It does happen? Our communities are at risk and it's okay that it does happen?

I want them to clean up the mess; I want them to close the loopholes. I'm going to ask the Premier again. We have dangerous criminals who aren't being checked up on, and someone's got to be accountable. This exposé was shocking. To the Premier: Knowing that our communities are at risk, will you hold someone accountable for this incredible negligence and incompetence?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I never said that there weren't disturbing situations. In fact, I led my answer with saying that there are disturbing situations. Of course there is more that we can do. I take this very seriously, as does our Attorney General, as does our Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

But, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we have one of the safest jurisdictions in North America. The fact is that we are hiring more officers. We are putting more resources in place. We will continue to work to keep our province one of the safest, if not the safest, in North America.

What I will not do is buy into rhetoric that vilifies one person as though somehow that is the solution to systemic issues. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to look at his record as a member of the Harper government as he talks about law and order and as he talks about vilifying people and putting people—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

New question?

NURSES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. I've had the privilege of meeting hundreds of nurses this week as we celebrate Nursing Week in Ontario. They shared with me countless stories of how they want a government that supports and defends our province's nurses, not a government that attacks the health care system. Just look at the last two years. This government has fired 1,600 nurses.

How does the Premier reconcile the fact, during this Nursing Week, that her government has fired 1,600 nurses?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to just say to all of the nurses in the province that we value their work. We understand how critical that work is to families across the province. I'm about to have a nurse in my own family. My youngest daughter is going to graduate from nursing this June, and I am more than proud that she has chosen that career.

We will continue to invest in health care personnel in this province. We've made a huge investment in our budget, a \$7-billion boost to the health care system. That will mean that there will be more personnel and that hospitals will be able to deal with the challenges that they have, including hiring more front-line health care personnel. We have hired more nurses. We will continue to hire more nurses.

We've also listened to nurses when they've talked to us about their scope of practice. We've increased their scope of practice, and that makes the health care system work better.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: Not only did they fire 1,600 nurses in the last two years, they continue to fire nurses despite the fact that a report, and this is shocking, from the Canadian Institute for Health Information—I think everyone trusts CIHI—confirmed “a dangerous reality about health care services first identified by” RAO.

What this CIHI report said is that Ontario's RN-to-population ratio is now the worst in Canada. No matter what spin the Premier gives, because of this firing of nurses we have the worst—the absolute worst—RN-to-population ratio in Canada.

Can the Premier please tell us, can she please reconcile to us why, here, during Nursing Week right now in Ontario, she is proud of the fact that her government has

overseen Ontario having the lowest RN-to-population ratio in Canada?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Leader of the Opposition is assiduously only talking about RNs. He is not talking about nurse practitioners. He is not talking about RPNs. The reality is that since 2003, more than 28,949 nurses have begun to work in Ontario. That is a huge investment in nurses in this province.

In 2016, the number of nurses employed in nursing in Ontario increased for the 12th consecutive year. Every single year, more nurses have been hired. That was necessary, because when this government came into office under my predecessor, there had been nurses slashed, there had been nurses demeaned across this province, and there was a huge gap. That's why there are 28,900 more nurses working in Ontario than there were when we came into office. Every year, more nurses are hired, and we will continue on that track.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: Since I can't get an answer on the nurse firings, one other thing I heard this week, when it came to Nursing Week—I was visiting the Vanier Centre for Women, the correctional institute, and I also visited oncology at SickKids. There was one common thing that was raised to me from the RNs. They said they couldn't believe the government's oversight that they were not included in the PTSD legislation.

Listen, these nurses have to see things we never want to see. They are affected. The government has been saying they're going to look at it—maybe; maybe down the road. I'm telling you, Mr. Speaker, we need nurses to be included in the PTSD legislation. It's the right thing to do. No more delays.

Can we get a commitment and a promise today from the Premier that no longer will there be this oversight? Over 8,000 nurses have signed the petition pleading with the government to include them in the PTSD legislation. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier give us that assurance today and do the right thing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you very much to the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I would ask where the Leader of the Opposition was a year ago when we were passing this legislation. That was the time to bring it forward, when we honoured our first responders, when we honoured our firefighters, our police officers, our corrections officers, our nurses in corrections facilities. You sat on your hands.

The third party helped us—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. To the Chair, please.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, we are dealing with all the first responders. Nurses in correctional facilities are covered under PTSD legislation, so you should do your homework. You should do your homework before you ask questions like this.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you. Start the clock.
New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier. Yesterday, in a self-congratulatory press conference, the Minister of Energy touted the Liberal government's short-sighted decision to sell off yet another batch of Hydro One shares. What he neglected to mention, though, was that the further privatization of our hydro system will ensure that hydro bills for everyday Ontario families will continue to climb.

1050

Why are the Premier and her Minister of Energy so excited that families who are already struggling will be left further behind?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member of the third party understands that building infrastructure in this province is important. He lives in an urban riding. He represents an urban riding that needs those investments. In fact, we continue to make investments in transit—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please, Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We know that the net proceeds will be reinvested in new infrastructure. I know he supports investing in infrastructure. We made a decision to maximize the value of our assets in order to make those critical new infrastructure investments. We are going to continue to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: The loss of the province's majority stake in Hydro One will cost Ontarians dearly. People's hydro bills will keep going up, and they will lose out on the services that revenue from Hydro One used to pay for.

Our hospitals, schools and long-term-care homes are already at a tipping point because of Liberal cuts. The sell-off will make the situation even worse. How can the Premier justify this boondoggle for Bay Street investors at the expense of the people of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Energy?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm pleased to rise to talk about what we're doing to continue to make rates affordable for all Ontarians across the province.

The Ontario fair hydro plan has already reduced rates by 17%. They've seen that by—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'll repeat: Rates have dropped down, as of May 1, by 17% compared to

last year; and by July 1 of this year, if passed through the legislation, we will see an additional 8%, bringing that total, on average, to 25%.

But the media know—I know the official opposition knows—that rates are set by the OEB. It's too bad that the third party doesn't understand that component.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, clearly the minister doesn't know how energy works in this province.

The Premier has no mandate to sell off Hydro One. It will hurt everyday families. It will put further strain on our public services. She knows that 80% of Ontarians oppose this sell-off, and yet she insists on moving forward.

Why is the Premier allowing already wealthy Bay Street investors to get filthy rich off the backs of ordinary Ontario families?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's not just this party that understands how the electricity system works. We've been working hard with stakeholders throughout the province to come forward with a fair hydro plan that's going to reduce rates by 25%.

I know the third party can't understand how the OEB applies the rates. They can go to their website. It's explained there very clearly. But the criticism—what's interesting with their obsession with Hydro One is that it's even more harsh. Tim Kiladze of the Globe and Mail calls the belief that ownership of utilities in Ontario affects rates one of the biggest misconceptions about electricity. Even Brady Yauch, an economist of the Consumer Policy Institute and frequent government critic, calls the idea of privatization increasing rates "a straw man."

You know what? When it comes to doing right for the people of Ontario, we're building the infrastructure, we're building the hospitals, we're building the schools because we have a plan to build Ontario up, unlike the opposition parties.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, Ontarians learned about 87-year-old Roelfina Dillerop. Roelfina was admitted to the Brampton Civic Hospital, but before she was moved into a hospital room, she spent five long days in the hallway of the ER.

Does the Premier think that a sick, elderly woman like Roelfina should be seen by her doctor in a public hallway of the busiest emergency room in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I believe that she and every other patient in Ontario deserve the very best care, and I believe physicians should have the opportunity to see their patients in the best circumstances.

We recognize that hospitals need support, that they need an injection of funding, which is exactly why \$500 million in funding is included in our budget to go directly to hospitals. That means a minimum 2% increase across the board for every hospital, but across the board it's more than a 3% increase to hospitals' budgets, and that's on top of the \$495 million that was already put on their base last year.

We recognize there is a need. That's why our budget addresses it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France G  linas: By the time Roelfina finally got her hospital room, her doctor told her family that she was severely dehydrated and that her stay in the hallway of the ER had made her respiratory condition worse. Roelfina never got better. She died at Brampton Civic Hospital.

Does the Premier see the connection between her years of frozen hospital budgets, her years of cuts to front-line health care workers, and heartbreaking stories like Roelfina's?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This is a tragic situation, and I'm very sorry to hear about it. What I recognize, and what our government and our budget recognize, is that there is a need to put a direct investment in hospital funding to increase that base, particularly in high-growth areas. I believe the member of the third party said this is a Brampton hospital. This is one of the highest-growth areas in the province, and so on top of the general injection of funding into hospitals, we've recognized that those high-growth areas need an additional amount of support.

Of course, there should be support for every patient across the province. That is what we strive for. That's why our budget addresses the challenges that hospitals are facing right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

M^{me} France G  linas: Brampton Civic Hospital said it point blank: They are overburdened by the large number of patients coming into the emergency department. Their ER sees, on average, 400 people per day. This is 160% more than what they were built to care for. The vice-president of medical affairs is even more blunt. He says that they need at least 200 more beds in the short term and 600 in the long term, just to keep up with what they have right now.

Does the Premier plan to address this crisis in Toronto, in the GTA—what's happening at Brampton Civic?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I say to the member opposite that we understand that not only does there need to be an increase to the base funding of hospitals, which we have put in place—\$500 million on top of the \$495 million that was put in place last year—we recognize that in high-growth areas there is a need for building.

I was at the Trillium Health Centre, announcing that we would be investing in an increase in beds, because we recognize, particularly in the communities—the member

of the third party acknowledges the GTA—where there is that high population growth, we need to make capital investments as well. We are doing that. We recognize the challenge. That's exactly why our budget has addressed those issues.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier. After 10 years, I thought I'd seen every imaginable government incompetence, but that all changed last week. Maureen, who's a constituent, tried to trade in her car, but it turns out that Fred and Pebbles Flintstone have a lien registered against it. Maureen received her used vehicle information package from ServiceOntario, which showed no liens on the car. However, the car dealer would not pay her because the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services had registered a lien against her valid VIN number in the names of Fred and Pebbles Flintstone. The documents prove that there are other false liens in place on more vehicles.

1100

Why did the ministry register liens on valid VINs in the names of Fred and Pebbles Flintstone, who live on the yellow brick road, and why did it take nine months to get it fixed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. As he knows, when I heard about this issue yesterday, I said that I was on top of it and I'd get to the bottom of it, and that's what I've done.

ServiceOntario was contacted by this individual in March, and the ministry discharged a lien at that time. We understand that she has since successfully sold her car. It appears that what happened in this case is, testing was done, and test liens were entered into the system by a technician—so it's a human error—in relation to these VINs. These testing pro formas were not removed immediately. ServiceOntario, of course, is reviewing what happened.

To my knowledge, there are no other similar cases, but I am committed to making sure that the right protocols are in place going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the Premier: Clearly, we all knew that this was an act of gross incompetence, as everyone knows that the Flintstones live on Rocky Road in Bedrock, USA, and that Fred drives a foot-mobile, not a 2006 Chevrolet Uplander.

I contacted CarProof, which carries the PPSR database. They were informed by this government that Maureen would have to hire a lawyer to expunge these liens.

How many more Mystery Machines have had liens placed on them in the names of Scooby-Doo and the gang and other Saturday morning cartoon personalities?

Speaker, I'm glad that the minister has worked on this and guaranteed to expunge this false and animated lien

against Maureen. But will she guarantee that others affected by these loony-tune shenanigans won't take nine months to get fixed?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I appreciate the member opposite's sense of humour.

I do take this issue very seriously, as the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. As I said before, to my knowledge, this has not happened before, and I'm making sure that it doesn't happen again.

I heard this morning that his constituent is very pleased with the information she received of late from ServiceOntario.

Just for your information, as well, when a lien is removed, it generally displays on the system for 60 days, showing it has been discharged. Once that lien is discharged, I want to emphasize, too, it does not affect an individual's ability to sell their vehicle.

I thank the member for bringing this to my attention yesterday. ServiceOntario will continue to provide any information he may need to respond to his constituent.

RING OF FIRE

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Premier this morning. Yesterday, the Premier was in Sault Ste. Marie. After conveniently forgetting to mention her lack of action on the Ring of Fire, she was asked by a reporter what was going on with the \$1 billion she promised for development. The Premier said, "That billion is available. It's there."

Can the Premier tell us exactly where the money is since it didn't appear in her budget this year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we have committed \$1 billion to building infrastructure in order to open up the Ring of Fire.

What I also said yesterday—because the member of the third party has not taken the whole transcript—was that we are working with the Matawa First Nations. We are determined that this development will be done in conjunction with First Nations.

I also said that our history in this province and in this country is riddled with bad examples of not working with First Nations, of not stewarding the land, of not being a partner, of not sharing the resources and the wealth of this land with First Nations. We're not going to do that again.

We are going to work in conjunction with First Nations. We are going to work to open up those communities—because, of course, this is about the wealth that's in the ground in the Ring of Fire, but it's also about the economic development of those communities that circle that very treasure that's in the land.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm still looking for that money in the budget.

This is just another example of the Premier making big promises and not following through. She was brag-

ging about how her budget would help the north, while at the same time there is no money at all for the Ring of Fire.

When will this Premier learn that the people of Ontario see through her desperate political tactics, and start walking the walk, in addition to talking the talk?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I was very clear yesterday, and I'm clear today, and I know that all of our members have been very clear: That billion dollars has been allocated. It is there. It is there to build the infrastructure, to get going on that road.

Hon. Charles Sousa: All part of page 73.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On page 73 there's a reference to that money. We have been working with the First Nations. We will continue to do that.

When I was in Sault Ste. Marie yesterday, I was actually correcting what had been said by members of the opposition, information that was in fact not accurate, because that money has not been removed. We are committed to investing in the Ring of Fire. We're working with the First Nations.

I'm sorry if the third party and the opposition don't think that that's a worthwhile endeavour. We know that if we are actually going to live up to truth and reconciliation in this country, then province by province, territory by territory, we have to change the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Yesterday in the House we heard the minister respond to the Leader of the Opposition and refer to the PCs' Bill 83. Upon reading this bill, I, too, find myself wondering how the opposition can speak about protecting Ontario's workers while Bill 83—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I dealt with this yesterday; I'm dealing with it today. It will be on government policy, please.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: This seems incredibly troubling. How could a bill that would abolish card-based certification and disrupt labour relations in the construction industry be supported by others who now pretend to care about labour issues? This bill refers to union members as predators and implies that unions are undemocratic.

Could the minister speak to clarify the implications of Bill 83?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for that important question. I agree with the member. It was puzzling to me as the Minister of Labour. I try to work with the opposition parties, but some days it's hard to figure them out.

We've got a private member's bill, Bill 83, coming forward. The policy of this government—and the policy of this government for a number of years—has been

card-based certification in construction. We have that policy because it makes sense. It's an industry that's mobile.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Come to order. Finish, please.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's an industry that is mobile, with projects that are often limited in duration. Our building trade unions, our construction unions work in partnership with incredibly successful Ontario companies. They fought long and hard for this process, and I don't agree with any member of this House who thinks it should be taken away.

Bill 83 simply is not government policy, and it doesn't benefit workers in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister, for your answer and your passion on this topic. It is clear that this bill would be a step in the wrong direction. Under our labour law, it would take us backwards in labour relations in this province, in a time when it is imperative to modernize and innovate.

We continue to hear more and more about how the world of work is changing. In today's workplaces, people are no longer keeping traditional nine-to-five business days or taking weekends off. It is common for Ontarians to be self-employed or have part-time or temporary employment. We need to ensure that we do all that we can to provide support for these changing workplaces.

Minister, can you please elaborate on what you are doing to address these changes and the challenges that they present?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you for the supplemental. I'm happy to stand in the House this morning to speak on this very, very important issue.

We all in this House know that the world of work is changing. We're facing challenges that are presenting themselves head-on as those changes take place. We started this very important conversation with the people of Ontario about two years ago. We talked to advocates. We talked to organized labour, businesses, workers, about what we wanted our labour and employment laws to look like. We know that fundamental changes are needed to create that sustainable framework where everybody in Ontario gets to share in the economic success of this province. We've got to stay competitive in this fast-paced, global economy, but we need to protect workers while we do that. We need to give them the protection they need and the protection they deserve. We want to reward those excellent employers in the province. They need a level playing field—the ones that obey the law.

I have the final report. I look forward to bringing it to the House very soon.

1110

ANTI-SEMITISM

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. In the recently launched Anti-Racism Directorate, the

minister addresses the need to stop systemic racism and discrimination against a number of communities. Yet there is no mention in this plan to combat anti-Semitism, to help the Jewish community—a community that is still one of the most targeted in Canada. Many Jewish community groups have come and raised this concern not only with the government but with the opposition.

Will the Premier ensure that the Jewish community in Ontario will be included in the ongoing work of the Anti-Racism Directorate? And will the Premier ensure that education on anti-Semitism is offered in all educational programs the director will aim to implement?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I think it is a solid assumption of, I would say, everyone in this House, that as we fight systemic racism, anti-Semitism is absolutely central to that struggle and we would never step away from that. We will continue to work to make sure that wherever there is racism, whether it is anti-Semitism or whether it is Islamophobia or whether it's anti-black racism, we root that out and that we make sure that our young people, as they go through school—you know, Mr. Speaker, we put in place an equity and inclusive education strategy many years ago to restore equity and anti-racism education within the education system because it had been removed, and we are absolutely committed to doing that across society.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: I think it is straightforward that we would all make that assumption. That's why it was surprising that there was this oversight initially. I'm encouraged the Premier is saying that they will correct this oversight.

The reality is, the Jewish community continues to be one of the most targeted groups when it comes to hate crimes in Ontario. In the latest Toronto Police Service report alone, the Jewish community was the target of 43 of 145 hate crime offences in 2016, meaning that 30% of the offences were directed towards the Jewish community. Similarly, in Hamilton, 21 out of 115 reported hate crimes in 2016 were directed towards the Jewish community.

These are not isolated incidents, and certainly the Jewish community is a target of hate. That's why I'm asking the Premier to guarantee, to assure this Legislature that the Jewish community will—and to get a commitment from the government that they will make an amendment that this oversight will be corrected. Can we get a commitment to an amendment on their legislation that will be supported by the Premier and all their members?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, there is a pattern developing. It is very important that every time there is something said that actually is not accurate, we counter that, because I do believe that the truth and facts really matter in Ontario.

So let me read from the anti-racism strategy, Mr. Speaker, on page—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just read from the anti-racism strategy, page 171 in the budget document. There are four points, and then the fifth point, which outlines what's part of the strategy, says: "Public education and awareness initiatives targeting racism, including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism." Mr. Speaker, it is right there.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier. Children needing developmental services are made to jump through hoops to get the supports they need. Families go into debt and are threatened with losing treatment because the money that they've been promised doesn't come. Cuts to special education means schools are understaffed and unable to provide the supports they need. As families struggle through teenage years, they are burdened with the thought of what's to come as their child becomes an adult and their services are lost.

In 2014, the Select Committee on Developmental Services recommended that recipients of Special Services at Home funding not lose that funding before Passport funding is in place.

When will the Premier act to ensure that essential services continue for vulnerable young adults?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community and Social Services.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: First, I would like to acknowledge the great respect that I, my ministry and this government have for those families who do care for their loved ones with developmental disabilities. That's precisely why we have more than doubled our budget since we took office to provide those supports and services for those with developmental disabilities.

The member did refer to the Passport program. This was a program that our government initiated in 2005-06. Initially, those most in need were accommodated—some 800 people. Through the years, we have grown that program considerably, and with the \$810 million in the 2014 budget, we were able to increase from 13,000 individuals receiving Passport for a grand total now of 24,000 people receiving that support.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Premier: These people need action, not platitudes from this government. Families have come here today to rally and fight for their children. They're here because their adult children are waiting years for the developmental services they need. Parents and other family caregivers are scrambling for support. Some have had to quit their jobs to pick up the slack created by your government.

Right now there are 11,000 waiting for Passport funding, with no guarantee it will ever come; 14,000 are waiting for supportive housing. Some can wait 22 years or more. Your government brags about eliminating the wait-list from three years ago, but the crisis in developmental services is still here, and it's growing.

When will your government eliminate the wait-list for developmental services and actually support these families?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the member opposite will be supporting our budget this year, because we are proposing some \$677 million in addition to the \$2.1 billion we already provide.

And of course, we are taking action. In fact, again, in terms of the Passport waiting list, what we do is we ensure that priority cases receive Passport funding first. They're prioritized very carefully according to their unique needs and their risk factors. Individuals with the highest need receive funding in as little as seven days, with about 75% receiving funding within six months.

We're working very hard on the residential support side, and this year's budget does include a component to particularly serve those who may be inappropriately housed in long-term care, hospitals or even in correctional facilities.

Our government is full of—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question?

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. We are fortunate, of course, that in Ontario we have an abundance of natural resources, including rich mineral deposits that support our province's mining industry and our manufacturing sectors.

According to the Ontario Mining Association, Ontario was number one in mineral production in Canada in 2015, producing far more than a quarter of the national total. And the value of this mineral production has gone up from—

Mr. John Yakabuski: He's right in front of you. Why don't you just ask him?

Mr. Steve Clark: Hand it to him. Hand him the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and the member from Leeds-Grenville will come to order.

1120

Mr. Arthur Potts: I was saying that the value of mineral production has gone up from \$5.7 billion in 2003 to \$10.8 billion in 2015. Our government is continuously working to support the mining industry in all areas across the province.

There are a number of programs in place to support our developing and modernizing industry. Ontarians want to know how the government is taking steps to ensure that our industry will continue to be a national leader—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Northern Development and Mines?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Thank you very much for the question. I want to thank the member for that.

Northern municipalities, dozens of them, understand the importance of the mining industry and the forest industry to their economies and the regional economies. That's why, for a very long time—a number of years now—we have had a flagship program in place to support not only mining but the large industrials across northern Ontario. We call it the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program, or NIER. That program is permanent. It provides, on an annual basis, a guaranteed \$120 million to help large industrials in northern Ontario deal with their energy costs. That can represent as much as a 25% reduction for these large industrials in northern Ontario.

The NIER program alone, since its inception, has supported large industrials in northern Ontario to the tune of \$730 million. That is a massive investment in large industrials in northern Ontario specifically, today, dealing with the mining sector. Lots of other programs are in place as well that perhaps I'll have an opportunity in the supplementary to reference.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker, through you to the minister, for the great work he is doing to advance the mining industry in northern Ontario and for explaining how the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program is working in helping my constituents in Beaches–East York and their investments in the mining industry, and helping to create the manufacturing we need.

I understand that the government of Ontario is investing \$100 million annually to strengthen communities across the north through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. This corporation is working to build strong and prosperous northern communities. It offers unique programs to help foster hope and opportunity across the north. The corporation does this by investing in northern businesses and municipalities. A vast majority of these projects have been extremely successful.

However, I understand these investments come with conditions that recipients are expected to adhere to. Would the minister please elaborate on the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. and how our government ensures these funds are used to support job growth in the north?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Again, I thank the member for the question. I want to clarify an issue that came up earlier this week in the House in relation to the NOHFC and, in particular, a company called Great Lakes Graphite.

First of all, I'll mention that we, as a government, have taken the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund from \$60 million to \$100 million annually, and we did that at a time of recession in the province of Ontario—a renewed and embellished commitment to the people of northern Ontario. Loans and grants provided by the NOHFC are attached with strict terms and conditions which clearly

outline that all funds, both loans and grants, as I referenced earlier this week, are required to be repaid in the event of a default.

I want to address the implication or the narrative that was attempted to be created the other day and make sure that people understand that there is significant third-party due diligence that is attached to all of the private sector applications that flow through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund.

This board and its operators do a great job of representing northern Ontario. This fund is a great fund for northern Ontario. It's important that people know there are terms and conditions attached. Third-party due diligence is done before the money goes out the door.

DISASTER RELIEF

Ms. Laurie Scott: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: As the minister knows, in my riding, the township of Minden Hills has been hit hard by the recent flooding. With water levels expected to continue to rise, businesses are being washed away and people are exasperated. I was in touch with the local funeral home in Minden, and despite placing 10,000 sandbags and deploying 23 sump pumps, overnight, unfortunately, they lost their battle. The owners felt helpless that their livelihood literally went under water.

The situation is desperate. The people feel that their government isn't acting to help them in their hour of need. Currently, the government's own website only shows the Ottawa River flood areas as being under assessment.

As the minister responsible for Ontario disaster recovery assistance, what is the government doing to help Ontarians in Minden Hills in this emergency?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Thank you for the question. Let me first commend and thank all of the volunteers and first responders in a number of communities right across Ontario who are dealing with what is, by their own estimation in their own calculations, a massive historic flooding situation. People will know that it's not only Ontario; Quebec has been massively and significantly affected as well.

Before I go into some detail in the supplementary, I would tell the member that Ottawa is being considered, but we have already activated the program when it comes to Renfrew county. As I understand it, they were the first piece of geography in Ontario that was significantly affected. The team from the ministry was on the ground. They went in, and they did their work. The water was so significant in the Renfrew county example that they were unable to even do an assessment. They made a recommendation to me, and we activated the program in Renfrew county.

That one is done and behind us. The work now continues for people to see if they're able to get support through the program. Ottawa is being considered, and I'll speak more directly to Minden in a second.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Of course, the community has been incredible in its assistance, but I joined the mayor of Minden yesterday in calling on the minister to urgently deploy the Ontario disaster assessment team to Minden and the surrounding areas. I was told that the government doesn't deploy assessment teams until after water levels have receded. Not only is this absolutely unacceptable, it is not accurate. People can't wait. They need assistance right now.

Will the minister activate the disaster recovery assistance program immediately to Minden Hills so that people will know that the government will provide assistance for those affected? You need to do it now, Minister.

Hon. Bill Mauro: The answer is simply no, I won't. I won't activate the program right now, and the member should clearly understand this. We've had an opportunity to talk about it. The assessment team needs to have an ability to get on the ground, create an assessment, define an area of geography and delineate the range and who might be eligible.

Now, as I said to you, as well, it's not necessary in certain circumstances for them to do an assessment if the water has not receded, if the rain continues. It's possible an assessment can come back to me without them actually being able to see it because the rain has persisted.

Speaker, there is work that has to be done, but I caution people not to overestimate or raise expectations on what may be eligible through our program. There's a municipal side and there's a private side. The private side deals simply with the essentials, if in fact they're eligible. The program is not a replacement for insurance.

We understand how traumatic this is for communities and for people in those communities. We have a program that helps, but I'm really concerned with people trying to expedite a process and raising expectations for their community members. I have reached out to a number of mayors and talked to them directly on this file, I would say, Speaker. We are doing what we can. The program is in place. We'll let the process unfold.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Premier. Jack O'Neil is a friend, a long-time community senior activist and president of Friends Over 55 Recreation Centre in Port Colborne. It is the oldest independent, non-profit seniors recreation centre in the Niagara region. The services are dependent on membership fees and donations.

Last year, the centre's hydro bill was just over \$150 for the month of April. This year, their hydro bill—I have it here—is almost \$600. If this government doesn't put a stop to the sell-off of Hydro One, it's going to be impossible for Jack to afford to pay these bills while still keeping his centre open.

What is the Premier going to do today for Jack and for seniors in my community who risk losing programming and services because of skyrocketing hydro bills?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know the Minister of Seniors Affairs will want to answer in the supplementary as well, but when it comes to hydro bills, the costs for electricity, all of those bills in this province will be going down, by summer, on average 25%. I know the honourable member mentioned Hydro One. Hydro One customers with designations of R1 and R2 will see a 40% to 50% reduction on their bills as well.

Mr. Speaker, we are addressing many of the concerns that people have when it comes to hydro bills. When it comes to seniors, we are ensuring that the Ontario Electricity Support Program is being enhanced by an additional 50%. So on top of the 25%, and the 40% to 50%, when you add in another \$540 a year, rates for seniors in this province are coming down significantly and long-lastingly.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Cindy Forster: We've seen the commercials but we haven't seen the legislation.

We learned yesterday that the Premier is going to sell off more shares of Hydro One. This comes days after the Premier actually defended Hydro One's executive pay increases of 500%. Meanwhile, seniors in my community could lose programming and services, and Jack and the seniors at the seniors centre are seeing these skyrocketing hydro bills that are going through the roof.

Will the government put a stop today to further sell-off of Hydro One and put vulnerable seniors ahead of shareholders?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: When it comes to vulnerable seniors, we've acted with the fair hydro plan, where they're going to see a 25% reduction on their bills. There's also the Ontario Electricity Support Program, where they're going to see a 50% increase to that rebate so they can see another \$540 off their bills. When it comes to vulnerable seniors, when it comes to vulnerable people in this province, it makes you wonder why they would put them on the last page of their plan.

We have made sure that we are acting. We are acting as quickly as we can to bring forward a comprehensive piece of legislation that will ensure a 25% reduction by summer—so much so that the OEB, in anticipation of our plan, have brought forward an additional 9%, bringing the reduction right now to 17%.

When it comes to the sale of Hydro One, we will make sure we invest that money in infrastructure across this province.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development. We have a lot to celebrate on job growth in this province. In fact, the unemployment rate is the lowest that it has been since 2001. It's at 5.8%. That news was very well received in my community of Kitchener Centre at a post-budget luncheon that I held.

While that figure is very noteworthy, we know that there are barriers to employment for many people. For example, youth face particular challenges in entering the labour market, finding a job that is full time or in their community or relates to what they studied in school. Could the minister please tell us what our province is doing to help young people get ready for the labour market?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member for Kitchener Centre. We know that our young people have so much to offer this province. When they can't find good jobs, we all lose out on their endless potential. Building on what we have accomplished through our youth jobs strategy, we're now launching Ontario's Career Kick-Start Strategy.

It invests \$190 million over the next three years and creates 40,000 more opportunities for our young people. It will open the doors to real-world, hands-on experiences as they transition from the classroom into the workforce, and it gives employers the opportunity to help train and equip the next generation of Ontario's highly skilled workforce with the skills they need to succeed. This is something that educators are asking for. Certainly employers have been asking for it. Most importantly, it's what young people want, and they deserve to kick-start their careers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister for her answer. After the budget was introduced, the leader of the third party was on the radio in my community talking about how life is hard for young people in the province these days, that young people are anxious about their costs as they move from post-secondary education to their first job.

One would hope that they would appreciate the many initiatives that are in the budget: things like pharmacare for those who are under 25, rent controls, and the career kick-start I heard the minister talking about. That's certainly going to make life easier for young adults. But we do know that dealing with student loans can be very daunting for many. Could the minister please tell us what her ministry is doing to help young people manage the costs of their education?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're definitely pleased that the NDP recognizes the challenge that young people face and the importance of helping young people navigate this changing and uncertain economy. It's something we are very much focused on. That's why we brought forth initiatives in this budget to help young people manage their pocketbook and maximize their prospects.

As we know, we're making tuition in college and university free, or better than free, for over 200,000 students—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please finish.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I encourage people to visit ontario.ca/osap to see the calculator to find out how much they might be eligible for.

But that's not all. In this budget, we're making changes so that people who have RESPs will not be penalized for saving for their education. They will be exempt from OSAP—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: And—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And no.

New question.

DISASTER RELIEF

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I appreciated your visit to Ottawa on Monday to assess the damage from the severe flooding in our region. My hope is that the province will act immediately to help the 346 people who witnessed their homes flood, and the 155 who had to be evacuated.

This morning, the general manager of the city of Ottawa's emergency and protective services department, Anthony Di Monte, said that the city has made a formal request for the disaster relief assistance program.

Even though the team is already on-site, it has yet to be activated. We have been dealing with the flooding on the Ottawa for over a week now, and disaster assistance from Ontario has been slow to respond. With more flooding on the way, can the Premier tell me and the Ottawa residents who are affected how quickly they can expect the disaster relief assistance program to kick in?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I thank the member for the question and an opportunity to give some detail for people. If the program is recommended for activation, and if the program is activated, there is still a fair bit of work to be done. The money or support that may flow to individual homeowners—remembering the program is not a replacement for insurance on the private side; it deals with essentials only. If it's activated and if they're eligible and if money flows, there is still a time lag there before any money might flow at all.

I would make sure you're communicating to your constituents that they're required to have receipts and details that they can submit. If the program gets activated, there is a time lag around that. Obviously, that can't be turned around. If the question is about whether financial assistance will be coming, they need to understand that even if I had activated the program five minutes ago, a cheque doesn't show up in the mail tomorrow. There's still work to be done by the constituents.

I would recommend, perhaps, calling into our ministry and getting a bit more detail, and we'd be happy to fill in some of the gaps for you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I thank the minister very much. We are expecting more rain this weekend, and residents were told by the city this morning to keep their sandbags in place as a result. The city has responded very compassionately, just this morning passing a tax relief

package for those who are affected by the flood. Over 2,000 residents have volunteered to help in various ways, such as bagging sand, loading trucks and packing sandbags around homes.

Again, while I appreciated the visit and the fact that the disaster relief has not yet been activated, there are other questions abounding about how Hydro One, for example, will be responding to flood victims whose electricity has been disconnected.

Compared to the flooding response across the Ottawa River in Gatineau, the province of Ontario hasn't been quite as visible. To the minister's point, it's important that my constituents are aware of some of the challenges. I'm wondering if the minister can lay out concrete steps the province of Ontario is taking to deal with this massive flooding, and the timeline that my constituents and my city can expect.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: First of all, I thank you for the question. You know, as we were there—the Premier, the member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, the member from Ottawa South and I—on Monday, we talked to individuals. We praised the good work of our volunteers and of our first responders. The amazing work that's being done to protect the houses of everyone is to be commended.

Certainly, for us, it's to stay engaged with our municipalities. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs' officials and ours and Ontario emergency preparedness have engaged with our municipalities every single day. We are, I would say, almost every hour receiving reports. If they need anything, we're responding. When they needed sandbags, we made the call right away and expedited those decisions. Certainly our goal is to be part of and with them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's a great pleasure to recognize my friend Ryan Singh, who is in the east gallery today with Paul Andre and Nikki Wright, who are on the Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals. Soon we'll have Justin Van Dette here—a constituent. We'll hear more about him later.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome to our special guests. Thank you for being here.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her

Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in her office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The following are the titles of the bills to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to amend the Aggregate Resources Act and the Mining Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ressources en agrégats et la Loi sur les mines.

An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying / Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'aide médicale à mourir.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MICHAEL KRULICKI

Mr. Bill Walker: On May 8, I had the privilege to visit Michael Krulicki at his home in Sauble Beach and to personally thank him for his service to our country that has helped build a lasting legacy for child amputees in Canada.

Mr. Krulicki is a stellar example of Canadian fortitude. He was only a teenager when he signed up to go overseas in 1942, a decision that would change his life forever. During an attack on the Gothic Line in Italy, he stepped on a landmine and lost his right leg below the knee.

After returning home, he met his future wife, Alice, and with her loving support and the comradeship he found with the War Amps, he adopted the association's philosophy: "It's what's left that counts." He didn't let his amputation hold him back. Instead, he was determined to learn many new pursuits and embrace life to the fullest. So he has devoted his lifetime of experience to the War Amps, holding multiple positions over the years, including national director of the Waterloo-Wellington branch.

It was amputee veterans such as Mr. Krulicki who started the War Amps Child Amputee (CHAMP) Program, which provides financial and emotional assistance to child amputees in Canada, thanks to the public's support of the War Amps Key Tag Service.

Mr. Krulicki says, "The CHAMP Program makes me feel proud and great. The War Amps is the biggest part of my life. I love the whole darn thing."

Mr. Krulicki exemplifies the tradition of amputees helping amputees. Members can hear more about it by watching Mr. Krulicki's video, "It's What's Left that Counts," on the War Amps' YouTube channel.

The video, "It's What's Left that Counts," won bronze in the DVD/online in-house production category at this year's International Mercury Awards, held in New York City in March. Mr. Krulicki won an award for his part in that video.

Similar to my personal hero and amputee Terry Fox, Mr. Krulicki himself represents an example of Canadian fortitude, persevering and living life despite difficult cir-

circumstances, never quitting and helping others along the way.

I invite all members to join me to thank Mr. Krulicki for his courage, selflessness and determination to provide hope and inspiration to thousands of other amputees in Ontario. I encourage everyone to support key tags and labels through the War Amps and to do your part to help amputees.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to rise to acknowledge the families who came to Queen's Park today. They came to fight for their loved ones, people with developmental disabilities that this Liberal government has badly let down.

The transition to adulthood means that they are unfairly cut off from services, forced to reapply, and end up on lengthy wait-lists. Some 11,000 adults are on wait-lists for services, and 14,000 are on wait-lists for supportive housing. Many have had to quit their jobs to care for and support their adult children. It is a job that requires their attention 24/7. It is exhausting.

Many are elderly who dread the thought of what will happen to their children when they pass on themselves. The lack of funding for some of Ontario's most vulnerable children is a disgrace.

I want to acknowledge the work of those who deliver developmental services. They do incredible work on very limited budgets. They live with the pressure put on them to balance budgets, and as a result they have to make cuts when they know there will be serious consequences.

Rygiel Supports for Community Living in Hamilton is one of those service providers. Tonight, they will be celebrating their 50th anniversary. I look forward to joining them this evening. I want to take the opportunity in the Legislature to thank them for their tireless work in our community and to congratulate them on reaching this significant milestone.

CENTRE ESPOIR SOPHIE

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Il existe dans ma circonscription d'Ottawa-Vanier une halte d'accueil francophone formidable, qui vient en aide aux femmes marginalisées du comté et de toute la ville. Il s'agit du Centre espoir Sophie, qui est situé dans le marché By. Le personnel du refuge reçoit quatre jours par semaine des femmes vulnérables qui s'y rendent pour manger, mais aussi pour socialiser et pour obtenir un soutien et des services dont elles ont vraiment besoin.

The centre's staff is cognizant of the difficult conditions encountered by these women, whether it's violence, mental illness, addiction, homelessness or poverty. The team uses a feminist approach to support the women on their journey and help them get empowered. Four days a week, when the women come to have dinner at the Centre espoir Sophie, they share a meal, they chat with

other women, they attend a workshop, they do a load of laundry, and they get information to obtain the services that they need and deserve.

Since its opening in 1997, the centre has become so popular that it now has to expand. It is supported by a large group of women in the community. Its godmother, its marraine, is Madeleine Meilleur, my predecessor, who has just been appointed the new commissaire aux langues officielles.

I just want to say bravo et merci au personnel du Centre espoir Sophie, mais merci aussi à ces femmes qui viennent chaque jour pour se prendre en main. Bravo à elles aussi.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to rise today to highlight national palliative care week. It's an annual awareness week organized by the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association. The purpose of the week is to bring awareness and education about end-of-life care in Ontario. This year's theme encourages Canadians to conquer their fears and discuss their end-of-life wishes.

Palliative care is about focusing on improving the quality of life for an individual and taking a holistic approach to focus on pain and symptom management.

In my riding, the Elgin Hospice Palliative Care Collaborative Residential Subcommittee has been working in partnership with St. Joseph's Health Care Society to develop a plan to build a residential hospice in Elgin county. I, too, am part of that subcommittee. The need for a residential hospice does exist, and it's my hope that the government is listening to the local concerns in my riding and will have the funds available when we are ready to go forward with a hospice.

Research shows that access to palliative care is beneficial for patients and for their families. It reduces the stress on patients and families, improves quality of life and patient satisfaction, and places less of a burden on caregivers.

I want to thank each and every health care professional who works within palliative care. Your work is not easy, and I commend you for what you do and your dedication to our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I think the province could do much better in access to palliative care in this province. I am encouraging the government to continue to support palliative care awareness throughout Ontario—not only in urban areas, but in rural and northern Ontario.

ONTARIO PROCESSING VEGETABLE GROWERS

Mr. John Vanthof: In March 2017, the Minister of Agriculture removed the directors of the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers. The stated reason was the lack of ability to reach a contract with some of the processors. They did not go to arbitration as is usually done.

The contracts have now been signed by the trustee and by the processors.

In a statement, the Minister of Agriculture said that a board would be re-elected by December 31, 2017. I've been contacted by many of the vegetable growers, who would urge the minister—and I urge the minister, as well—to proceed with those elections before December. There is quite a bit of uncertainty in the industry. A board in place does a lot more things than just negotiate contracts. He has committed to hold an election before December 31, 2017. The question that the processors are asking and that I am asking is, why wait? Why continue to foster this uncertainty? Why continue to worry producers?

Do what was promised. It was very unconventional, very controversial to dismiss a board, and it's continuing to be very controversial. The best way to solve this issue is to announce elections to return the board of the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers.

RIDING OF ETOBICOKE NORTH

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I have the privilege and honour, Speaker, of sharing with you a number of the developments in the great riding of Etobicoke North. They span the domains of health care, education, hydro and transport, and I think there's a lot of excitement from my own residents and constituents.

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First off, we are investing something in the order of about \$400 million for a massive built-out expansion of Etobicoke General Hospital. This will quadruple the footprint, adding something like 250,000 square feet. Many different areas are being upgraded: a state-of-the-art emergency room, a neurodiagnostic area, cardiology, respirology, dialysis and so on.

Folks are very excited about the free tuition. For families annually earning less than \$50,000, college or university is free. I would encourage folks to check out the OSAP calculator.

People are telling me about their excitement at receiving a 25% hydro price reduction, and most especially the OHIP+ pharmacare for medications for individuals under the age of 25: 4,400 medications, everything from depression to type 1 and type 2 diabetes, asthma, epilepsy and so on, in so many other different areas.

We also have about a billion dollars coming in transportation, with eight—count them, eight—new stops in the riding of Etobicoke North, all the way from Islington to Humber College.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm proud to share with the House that the community of Parry Sound ranks number one in organ and tissue donations in the province.

Applause.

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes, thank you. The donor registration rate is 54%, well above the provincial average of

31%. Thank you to Mayor Jamie McGarvey for helping to drive registration in Parry Sound, and thank you to all the residents who have registered to be a donor.

I would also like to mention Sandra Holdsworth, a donor recipient, and thank her for her advocacy on this issue on the Muskoka side of the riding. Sandra is passionate about increasing organ donation rates.

Bracebridge, with a 51% rate, ranked number six in the province. Interestingly, seven out of the top 10 communities for organ and tissue donation are from northern Ontario.

As we all know, organ donation is critical. One organ donor can save up to eight lives, and can enhance the lives of up to 75 more, through the gift of tissue.

Often those who have filled out donor registration cards in the past may not actually be on the list of registered donors, so I encourage everyone to visit beadonor.ca and register to be a donor. All you need is your health card, and it only takes a minute to register.

I also encourage everyone to inform their family of their wishes. You can make a huge difference in the life of someone in need.

EAST YORK HALL OF FAME

Mr. Arthur Potts: Speaker, I'm very proud to be able to stand here today and tell you about an incredibly fantastic community project spearheaded by a constituent of mine, Mr. Justin Van Dette. Justin is joining us in the east gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Justin is a long-time East York activist, and also happens to be the second cousin of my partner, Lisa Martin. That makes us related.

A little over a year ago, Justin had a vision: to create an East York Hall of Fame. I'm very pleased to announce that after a lot of hard work, Justin's vision has come to fruition.

Raymond White, Odysseas Papadimitriou, Richard Ellis, Rizwan Desai, Barb DiGiulio, Ken Reid, Joe Cooper and the Honourable Alan Redway have all agreed to sit on the board of directors of the East York Hall of Fame, and Justin will sit in as the president.

In Justin's words, "The East York Hall of Fame is a new volunteer organization that's committed to recognizing those special individuals who have made a real difference in our community."

Just this past Monday, May 8, the East York Hall of Fame was launched and officially opened for nominations. Some of our East York hopefuls include Rob and Rich Butler, Whipper Billy Watson, George Armstrong, True Davidson, Steve Stavro, Will Arnett, John Candy, Kiefer Sutherland, Stephen Harper, Agnes Macphail, Vincent Massey and, of course, our very own Premier, Kathleen Wynne.

I'm absolutely delighted that East York is lucky to have a great community leader such as Justin who can put this project into fruition and make it work. Go, East York.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: The Liberals' budget is bad for Ontario and bad for Perth–Wellington. It spends more; it borrows more. Worst of all, it sticks our grandchildren with the bill for Liberal mistakes and mismanagement. The finance minister's claim of a balanced budget is laughable. Even after the reckless fire sale of Hydro One and various other cash grabs and accounting tricks, the Liberals are still hiding a \$5-billion operating deficit. They've grown the debt to a crushing \$312 billion, or roughly \$22,000 for every person in this province. That's double what it was when the Liberals took power in 2003. What a disgrace.

Despite all of the disastrous spending, despite all of the cynical vote-buying, this government is still leaving rural communities behind. For years, rural municipalities have been denied stable, predictable funding for the infrastructure we need, priorities like natural gas delivery and wastewater management systems. Our hospitals and rural health care services aren't getting the support they need. Long-term-care beds are being transferred out of our local communities.

Before the budget, the Ontario PCs put forward a few simple requests. We called for a very real plan to pay down debt, to scrap the terrible Green Energy Act, to put an immediate moratorium on school closures and to bring executive salaries under control. The Liberals have ignored these sensible ideas, and it is for that reason and many more that we cannot support their reckless budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I just want to inform the members that I have tabled with the Clerk the requisite motion to have night sittings under the standing orders.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ST. POLA DRUGS INC. ACT, 2017

Mrs. Martow moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr65, An Act to revive St. Pola Drugs Inc.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

CHILDHOOD APRAXIA OF SPEECH
AWARENESS DAY ACT, 2017LOI DE 2017 SUR LA JOURNÉE
DE SENSIBILISATION À L'APRAXIE
VERBALE DE L'ENFANT

Ms. Thompson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 131, An Act to proclaim Childhood Apraxia of Speech Awareness Day/ Projet de loi 131, Loi

proclamant la Journée de sensibilisation à l'apraxie verbale de l'enfant.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: This bill proposes that May 14 of each year be dedicated to raising awareness of childhood apraxia of speech.

PETITIONS

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Mr. Todd Smith: This comes from the Prince Edward Family Health Team.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government needs to strengthen primary care as the foundation of the health care system to achieve health system transformation goals of Patients First; and

"Whereas research shows that interprofessional primary health care delivers better outcomes for people and better value for money; and

"Whereas an investment in primary care will help address recruitment and retention challenges, build strong interprofessional primary care teams and ensure high-quality people-centred primary health care delivery in Ontario; and

"Whereas over 7,500 staff in over 400 community health centres, family health teams, aboriginal health access centres and nurse practitioner-led clinics are being paid below rates recommended in 2012 and as a result are facing challenges recruiting and retaining health providers, including chiropractors, nurse practitioners, dietitians, registered nurses, registered practical nurses, health promoters, occupational therapists, psychologists, pharmacists, respiratory therapists, chiropractors, physiotherapists, mental health and social workers, physician assistants, managers and administration;

1520

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in interprofessional primary health care teams with a commitment of \$130 million annualized, with an implementation plan over two years, to ensure interprofessional primary health care teams can effectively retain and recruit staff."

I'll sign this and send it to the table with page Gurjaap.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition that comes from all over the northeast, but I'd like to thank Mona Filion from Azilda in my riding. It goes as follows:

"Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

"Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

"Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

"Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it, and ask Eesha to bring it to the Clerk.

EPIGENETIC RESEARCH

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I have a petition here from some young scientists at the Bishop Strachan School addressed as follows:

"We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, Canada, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

"Epigenetics is defined as the study of changes in organisms caused by modification of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself;

"Whereas real progress is being made in the field of epigenetics, particularly in the treating of cancer, heart disease, diabetes and mental illnesses;

"Whereas the insight from the study of the field of epigenetics is having wide application in the field of genomics, proteomics, biological medicines, and health and human disease;

"We, the undersigned, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fund epigenetic research across Ontario."

I agree, will affix my signature and send it to you via page Kenna.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the North York General Hospital (NYGH) recently announced its intention to close the NYGH Branson Ambulatory Care Centre as of June 1, 2017, and terminate all outpatient services at the NYGH Branson site as of June 1, 2019; and

"Whereas, located on Finch Avenue and west of Bathurst Street in north Toronto, the Branson site serves approximately 90,000 patients a year; and

"Whereas it provides urgent and efficient care for non-threatening emergencies; and

"Whereas it also features the total joint assessment care, orthopaedic treatment centre, the Wright prostate centre, Cataract High Volume Centre, Diabetes Education Centre, child and adolescent eating disorders program, addiction program, Assertive Community Treatment Team, child and adolescent outpatient mental

health, Ontario breast screening program, and a point of care; and

"Whereas Branson is known for quality service to many of the area's seniors and new Canadians; and

"Whereas closure of the Branson site would be detrimental to the local community at large and compound on the volume and wait times at neighbouring hospitals located a fair distance away;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the NYGH and Minister of Health to refrain from shutting down the Branson site and invest in future care of this local north Toronto community."

I will sign, of course. I support this petition and give it to page Emma.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm reading a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that states:

"Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are concerned about the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

"Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

"Whereas the Ontario government is currently reviewing employment and labour laws in the province;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change employment and labour laws to accomplish the following:

"—ensure that part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time permanent counterparts;

"—promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;

"—offer fair scheduling with proper advance notice;

"—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

"—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temporary agencies, subcontractors or workers themselves;

"—end the practice of contract flipping, support wage protection and job security for workers when companies change ownership or contracts expire;

"—extend minimum protections to all workers by eliminating exemptions to the laws;

"—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

"—offer proactive enforcement of the laws through adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the laws;

"—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

"—all workers must be paid at least \$15 an hour, regardless of their age, student status, job or sector of employment."

I couldn't agree more. I'm going to sign it and give it to Gabriel to be delivered to the table.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I have a petition addressed here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and signed by a couple of hundred residents, as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario, through its agency Metrolinx, is undertaking the development of light rail transit (LRT) along Finch Avenue West, from Keele Street to Humber College (north campus); and

"Whereas the community of Rexdale, north Etobicoke, has a limited transit connection to the whole of Etobicoke and the rest of Toronto; and

"Whereas many residents need public transit to commute to their jobs, shopping or services, including to the Woodbine Centre, the Woodbine Entertainment centre, L.B. Pearson airport, the airport employment hub, and other parts of the city; and

"Whereas north Etobicoke and its neighbouring communities have a very high unemployment rate and a high level of exclusion from the rest of Toronto and the GTA; and

"Whereas it would be more effective to extend the construction of the Finch LRT line at the time it is being initially built,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recommend to Metrolinx to extend the Finch light rail transit line from Humber College to the Woodbine Centre, Woodbine Entertainment centre and the airport employment hub to connect with the extension of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT line and/or the SmartTrack rail development; and, further,

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recommend to Metrolinx to ensure that such transit developments carry sufficient community benefits in jobs, training, apprenticeships and social enterprise opportunities, with a priority placed on recruiting first from workers and residents in Etobicoke North, York West (Humber River/Black Creek), including the Jane-Finch, Humber Summit and Humbermede communities."

I fully agree, sign it, and send it to you via page Maggie.

APRAXIA

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas all children in the province of Ontario deserve every opportunity to reach their full potential; and

"Whereas speech and language pathologists in Ontario are afforded the capabilities to provide a diagnosis of childhood apraxia of speech and receive specialized mandated training; and

"Whereas intensive and frequent individualized professional speech therapy, multiple times weekly, is needed to facilitate verbal speech; and

"Whereas school-aged children with severe and significant speech and language disorders like childhood apraxia of speech are not receiving the quality or quantity of speech therapy outlined as essential by current evidence and research, by either CCACs or school boards;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the government of Ontario to declare that May 14 is Apraxia Awareness Day."

I absolutely agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature to it and send it to the table with Maddison.

SERVICES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Petitions? The minister—the member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: That's okay, Speaker. You can call me a minister. I'm ready for it.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas when children living with ... developmental disabilities turn 18, support from the Ontario government drastically changes;

"Whereas families in Windsor-Essex and across Ontario are met with continuous waiting lists"—and other challenges—"when trying to access support under the Passport program;

"Whereas waiting lists place enormous stress on caregivers, parents, children and entire families;"

Whereas it is difficult to access safe and affordable housing, adequate supports and respite services without immediate access to Passport funding;

"Whereas all Ontarians living with developmental disabilities are entitled to a seamless transition of services" from childhood to adulthood;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To take immediate action to eliminate the" current "waiting lists for Passport funding so that people living with ... developmental disabilities and their families can access the support they deserve."

I fully support this, and will sign it and send it to the table with page Gracin.

1530

GOVERNMENT ANTI-RACISM
PROGRAMS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontarians are concerned that individual, systemic and cultural racism continues to create unfair outcomes for racial minorities in Ontario;

"Whereas the time has come to remove the social and economic barriers that prevent our province from achieving true equality;

"Whereas in order to accomplish that objective and to tackle racism in all of its forms, our government has created the new Anti-Racism Directorate;

"We, the undersigned, acknowledge both our support for the concept behind the Anti-Racism Directorate, and recognize that there is still work to be done to build an inclusive Ontario where everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or cultural background, has an equal opportunity to succeed.

"Therefore, we petition the government to work with key partners, such as businesses, community organizations, educational institutions and the Ontario Human Rights Commission in an effort to create a scope for the Anti-Racism Directorate...."

I agree with this. I will sign it and give it to page Noah to bring down.

DENTAL CARE

Mr. Todd Smith: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer's disease; and

"Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

"Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

"—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

"—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

"—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario."

I'll sign this and send it to the table with page Matt.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is a petition to repeal Ontario's breed-specific legislation.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

"Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective" and cruel "approach to dog bite prevention; and

"Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners' Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types."

On behalf of the over 1,000 dogs that have lost their lives—family pets—I'm going to sign this and give it to Charlene to be delivered to the table.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Han Dong: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Cambridge, Ontario, is a municipality of over 125,000 people, many of whom commute into the greater Toronto area daily;

"Whereas the current commuting options available for travel between the Waterloo region and the GTA are inefficient and time-consuming, as well as environmentally damaging;

"Whereas the residents of Cambridge and the Waterloo region believe that they would be well-served by commuter rail transit that connects the region to the Milton line, and that this infrastructure would have positive, tangible economic benefits to the province of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Direct crown agency Metrolinx to commission a feasibility study into building a rail line that connects the city of Cambridge to the GO train station in Milton, and to complete this study in a timely manner and communicate the results to the municipal government of Cambridge."

I support this petition. I'll sign it and give it to page Kenna.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The time for petitions is over.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 10, 2017, on the motion for allocation of time of the following bill:

Bill 127, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / *Projet de loi 127, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Normally I'd say that it's a great pleasure to rise to debate the bill of the day; however, sadly, we're not debating the Liberal budget. Instead, we're debating a time allocation motion on the budget.

In the most basic sense, a time allocation motion is "a motion that allocates the amount of time to be spent on any proceeding that remains on a government bill." The

Parliament of Canada, on their website, has a more practical explanation of what time allocation means. It says this: "While the term 'time allocation' connotes ideas of time management more than it does closure, a motion to allocate time may be used as a guillotine by the government." That's exactly what we're seeing today: This motion is being used as a guillotine for debate by the government.

Speaker, as the corrections critic, I was saddened to see that the words "probation" and "parole" were nowhere to be found in the corrections section of this bill. The only reference made to the safety of inmates and staff dealing with increasing assaults in our jails was actually buried away in the very last sentence of the section, in a throwaway line.

There is also no mention of any budgeted spending for new jails. Now, imagine our surprise when a few days later—still no details whatsoever—the government announced that it was in fact going to build two new jails, one in Ottawa and one in Thunder Bay. The location—I'm referencing the one in Ottawa—is unknown. The cost is unknown. The timeline is unknown. I eagerly await the details of these announced projects to emerge and will be following along closely as they do.

At the same time, we are somewhat concerned about the thought of this Liberal government building another jail. Their flagship jail, the Toronto South Detention Centre, which I have visited on several occasions, summarizes many of the ways in which this government has handled the corrections file.

Mr. James J. Bradley: In what capacity?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: As a visitor, not in any other capacity. But thank you to the member from St. Catharines.

Toronto South is our most expensive detention centre, yet its problems are already starting to pile up.

As I mentioned, probation and parole officers didn't even get a mention. I'm disappointed that there was no relief in this budget to be found for Ontario's probation and parole officers, who struggle with the highest caseloads in the country. This dangerous situation has been flagged for this government not only by members of the opposition dating back several years, but by front-line staff and even the Auditor General.

Despite these clear warnings, the individuals tasked with critical responsibilities such as assessing the risk of sex offenders simply cannot keep up with the work. This crisis in community corrections, due to overloaded officers, jeopardizes public safety first and foremost, but also negatively impacts probation and parole officers, who realize a tragedy is waiting to happen, and even offenders who are trying to turn their lives around.

Probation and parole officer caseloads are amongst the highest in the nation, and each case requires a massive amount of paperwork—that's code for "red tape"—that is keeping our officers out of the community.

Given the lack of progress on this critical issue, and the government's unwillingness—or shall I say inability—to address it, the official opposition has asked

Ontario's Ombudsman to step in and investigate the broken probation and parole system.

The official opposition made five budget requests. I'm going to read these five asks off quickly here:

Number one was a long-term plan to get Ontario's debt under control.

A second one was immediate steps to address the root of Ontario's hydro crisis. These measures include: stop signing contracts for power we don't need—and I can certainly indicate and tell this Legislature of a number of projects in the riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex where we don't need those signed contracts; dismantle the Green Energy Act; stop the fire sale of Hydro One; and rein in exorbitant executive compensation in energy.

That was the second ask.

1540

The third ask was simply solutions to addressing Ontario's housing crisis, including evidence-based measures to address both supply and demand, the establishment of a panel of industry experts and an immediate review of the government portfolio.

Fourthly, we were asking for immediately making cap-and-trade revenue-neutral, where any money generated is returned to hard-working Ontarians.

Lastly, our fifth ask was an immediate moratorium on school closures and an immediate review of the flawed Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline that determines these closures.

Although the government ignored each of these requests, we will continue to push for these issues.

On one hand, the Liberal government claims this is a balanced budget. On the other hand, the Ontario Financial Accountability Officer stated that the province's net debt will actually increase to \$350 billion by 2020. We're already starting to see the negative impacts of high levels of provincial debt which has doubled under Liberal rule.

The province now spends more on debt interest—that's \$12 billion; that's \$1 billion a month—than it does on post-secondary school education, which is \$8.4 billion, and community safety, one which I am very, very interested in following, which is only \$2.8 billion. This is something to keep in mind as troubling reports keep emerging of a complete lack of oversight of offenders within our communities due to this government's appalling track record on community safety.

The Auditor General has also expressed concerns with questionable Liberal accounting practices. The artificially balanced budget includes over \$500 million in pension assets which Ontario's Auditor General specifically did not authorize, and the Liberals have in fact ignored the Auditor General and are counting this money to falsely claim that they have a balanced budget. We know that facts still matter. This is not a balanced budget. There is more than a \$5-billion operational deficit that the government is hiding through cash grabs, unauthorized use of pension assets and one-time revenue, such as the fire sale of Hydro One.

On the sale of Hydro One, it is truly outrageous that this government claims that it must sell off Hydro One to

pay for infrastructure. Governments of all stripes were able to get through World Wars I and II, the Great Depression, booms and busts through the 20th century and still build infrastructure without resorting to sell off our province's crown jewel. They're selling the farm to pay the bills.

Speaking of farms, Mr. Speaker, the many people in my area and in the agricultural industry are a very integral part of the economy and we're very disappointed that Ontario's agriculture or agri-food budget is being cut by \$47 million. Given the lack of detail surrounding several announced measures that were mysteriously absent from the budget, we had hoped that the government would allow for more meaningful debate. Sadly, here we are debating the fact that the Liberal government wants to slam the window shut for debate on their budget. It's clear they just don't want to answer to anyone anymore.

Speaker, as I conclude my remarks, I want to simply say that on yet another time allocation motion brought forward by this government, I will offer one closing thought. This attitude towards governance and an unwillingness to listen to the growing number of Ontarians who disagree with Liberal decisions may end up being this government's downfall.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

WITHDRAWAL OF BILL 83

Mr. Jim McDonell: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. I seek unanimous consent to revert back to motions, without notice, regarding Bill 83, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to the determination of bargaining units and the certification of trade unions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Do we have unanimous consent for the motion? Agreed? Carried.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I move that the order for second reading of Bill 83, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to the determination of bargaining units and the certification of trade unions, be discharged and the bill be withdrawn from the order paper.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member has moved that. I haven't got it in front of me. He's moved that. Do we agree? We agree. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

TIME ALLOCATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to have a few minutes to talk about the time allocation motion on the budget.

It's interesting. Just before I came down here, I had a meeting with the Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals, who are here on a lobby day to talk about the health and safety issues of workers in this province. I

met with Nicola Wright, who was the executive director, and Paul Andre, who was the VP of prevention services.

It's interesting that there was really nothing in the budget that actually addressed—other than a few changes to compensation that I will get into, in the Workers' Compensation Act, there's nothing in the budget to address the fact that the fatalities in this province—we just had the National Day of Mourning on April 28. We continue to have around 300 fatalities in this province each year. Nothing has changed in that measure. There have been no additional dollars added to the budget to make sure that there is any enforcement of safety in this province.

Today I want to spend a little bit of time talking about the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, formerly known as the Workers' Compensation Board, in the province. As the labour critic, I'm going to talk about some of those changes.

If you talk to some of the labour folks in the province, they welcomed a little bit of good news in this budget. In fact, the government is planning to remove the statutory bar for chronic mental stress claims, effective January 1, 2018—not retroactively. I'm sure there are hundreds of people sitting in the queue who have been denied benefits on the basis of chronic mental stress for many years. I see the member from—

Interjection: Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —Parkdale–High Park, who has even been on hunger strikes with people who have been denied benefits in more recent years.

Does this change actually mean an end to discrimination against injured workers with chronic mental stress? Maybe. At present, the compensation act bars claims for mental stress. The government's label for mental illness caused by work that isn't preceded by a physical injury—so there has to be some physical trauma that causes mental stress, with one narrow exception: You can only get benefits if your mental stress is an acute reaction to a sudden and unexpected traumatic event arising out of the course of your employment.

For example, when I was working for the Ontario Nurses' Association, we had a nurse who was taken hostage by a psychiatric patient at the Niagara Falls hospital. She was awarded benefits, but it took a while to get those benefits awarded.

Three years ago, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal ruled that the bar on chronic mental stress claims is discriminatory and violates the charter, but the government took no action on that for three long years. Part of this bill that's in the budget bill—and I don't know why it's in the budget bill or why it isn't out there on its own, because it is very important to many workers in this province. But anyway, if the proposed budget legislation passes, which we know it will because we have a majority government, it will amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to remove the unconstitutional provisions.

However, there's a poison pill. There's always a poison pill when the Liberals table legislation. Although

a worker will now be entitled to benefits under the insurance plan for chronic or traumatic mental stress arising out of and in the course of the worker's employment, they have not removed subsection 13(5), which says that a worker is not entitled to benefits for mental stress caused by decisions or actions of the worker's employer relating to the worker's employment, "including a decision to change the work to be performed or the working conditions, to discipline the worker or to terminate the employment."

I know, having represented nurses for more than 20 years in their workplaces, that many times the failure of employers—hospital employers, community health employers, nursing homes—to actually address the stress in the workplace, whether it was the workload—people having to work many, many hours of overtime because of lack of staffing; having to work short-staffed; having to deal with emergencies in their workplace—or the employers' failure to address bullying or harassment in the workplace by physicians against nurses or employee-to-employee harassment actually leads to the discipline or the termination that now continues to be part of whether or not you get benefits for mental stress. Although they fixed one thing, they failed to actually fix the other piece.

1550

In addition to removing that, they've added another poison pill. That poison pill is that it licenses WSIB to make policies setting different evidentiary requirements and adjudicative principles for different types of entitlement. So if you break a leg or you hurt your back, there's one set of rules. But if you have a mental health issue or a stress issue related to work that isn't part of being disciplined or terminated, there are going to be different rules, but they haven't set out what those rules are. They're going to have to do that.

The labour folks and the experts around compensation here in the province have some problems with that, because this is a significantly higher-threshold test for cause, as the significant contributing factor test that generally applies to any other type of illness or injury in the province. If adopted in Ontario, it would constitute a real, differential change. It would open the door for different interpretations and, probably, would reduce the number of claims that are actually reversed at the tribunal level. So it is problematic.

As I said, there's always a poison pill when we get these pieces of legislation. The government continues to embed these important pieces of legislation in the budget or in an omnibus bill, so that if you don't vote for the entire bill, then they can say, at the end of the day, you're not supporting this piece of legislation. I can tell you that we're supporting a part of it, but we're not supporting all of it.

I've only got about a minute left, and I want to spend that time talking about Peterborough. In the GE plant in Peterborough, for many, many years, occupational illness—asbestosis; I think 650 claims, of which only one third were ever approved. Now, suddenly after 20 years,

the government is actually in there trying to perhaps correct that. So here are thousands of people, hundreds of whom have filed claims, who for years have been without benefits.

I can tell you that in my constituency office, just recently this past year, I had a woman come in whose husband had worked in a paper mill for a long time. He passed away a year and a half before—he was diagnosed with mesothelioma. For some reason, he fell through the cracks—like, perhaps, people in many manufacturing places here in the province that are now closed. Twenty years later, we did the work and this woman has actually been approved for benefits. But she lived in poverty for 20 years. Her kids never got to go to college. She is 67 years old. She finally, now, is going from a guaranteed income supplement to a pension that will at least let her live comfortably in her senior years.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this. I wanted to get on the record about the WSIB changes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Second call: Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents in Windsor West to talk about the motion before us, which is a time allocation motion on the budget. I don't think anybody but the Liberals who read the budget doesn't realize that it was not only rushed together in many aspects, but now the Liberals are trying to rush it through the House and get it passed with as little discussion as possible, with as little review as possible.

That's certainly not something that we have ever supported on this side of the House. It's something that the Liberals say that they don't support, and yet they do it frequently. We're even seeing that at the federal level now, where they criticized the Harper government for time allocation motions and closure motions, and yet this is what they choose to do time and time again: Shut down debate and ram through whatever legislation they want to.

To speak specifically to what's in the budget and the time allocation—because they do have a majority, so they're going to do whatever they want, so this may be my only opportunity to speak to the budget; I haven't had a chance yet. It's interesting how the government side—this is the way they do things—likes to throw little tidbits in, things that look good: "Look, something shiny. Everybody look over here." Then they put a whole bunch of junk in the budget, a lot of nice flowery words, but not a lot of substance.

Specifically, their pharmacare plan: We announced our pharmacare plan, which would cover everybody in this province, regardless of age; we're not discriminating against anybody based on age. We would start off with some essential drugs and expand that over time. It's actually a very responsible way of doing it, I would think, to look at what people need right now, and then expand that over time; roll it in slowly, so that as more and more people have access to their medications and more people are taking them as they should, you see fewer and fewer people entering into the medical system, fewer doctors'

visits, fewer hospital visits, which is saving money. It's the money we can put back into our plan and increase the number of prescriptions that would be covered for people. That would be the responsible thing to do.

But we caught the Liberals off guard, so they rushed it into their budget and made an announcement that they would cover anyone 24 and under. What's interesting, though, is that nowhere in the budget is there a line that actually shows the money that they've committed to this pharmacare plan. So while they want to talk about it, there's nothing in black and white in the budget showing a number that they are actually committed to putting into their drug plan.

It's not really universal pharmacare. They really shouldn't be calling it universal pharmacare. That's not what it is. "Universal" means everybody is covered, that you're not discriminating against anybody in the province, that everybody's going to get the same benefit. Whereas we see with the Liberals that because we put out an announcement, they wanted to throw something in there to make them look really progressive—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Back of a napkin.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back of a napkin, just like their many other plans—they throw in what they're calling pharmacare, leaving out so many people in this province.

Another thing: They talk about the Ring of Fire. It's nowhere in the budget, not a mention in the budget. It's like they think they can put whatever they want in the book—or not put a bunch of stuff in the budget book—and then just talk about things, and people won't actually look into the budget and see what is or is not there.

Then what they do is that they move to time-allocate or to close debate on it, so that those of us in the opposition seats don't have time to draw attention to what's lacking in the budget. They want to limit our voice and the voice of our constituents, so that we don't have an opportunity to point out that there are gaping holes in their budget. There are things they are talking about that aren't in the budget.

But the one thing that they did put in the budget—it's finally in black and white, because we all know that in 2014 they didn't run on it; never once did anybody on the government side, none of the candidates from the Liberals, go door to door and say, "Hey, we're going to privatize hydro." None of them said it.

At least, if nothing else, the Conservatives had the courage to put it down on paper, with one of their members' pictures right beside it, saying, "We believe that selling off 100% of a public asset is a good idea." At least then they had the courage to run on their plan. Now, suddenly, they're backtracking. They don't think anybody is going to dig through and see what their position has been in the past. They certainly don't want you talking about their voting record. But at least then—maybe not now, but then, in 2014, they had the courage to actually run on what they truly believe in, which was selling off 100% of Hydro.

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The Liberals, on the other hand—in fact, the Premier said, "We will not sell off Hydro. We will not privatize." She said that time and time again. None of them actually ran on it. Now it's in the budget; now they've actually put it in the budget. The majority of people in this province do not approve of selling off that public asset. They've never, ever given the Liberals a mandate to sell off that asset. I can proudly stand here and say that New Democrats are the only party that have stood behind Ontarians and said, "We do not—don't now, haven't in the past, never will have supported the sell-off of our public hydro asset."

Conservatives can't say the same thing; that's a totally different story. The Liberals can't say they ran on it—well, they do say they ran on it. I don't know how to state this in a way without using a word you're going to say is unparliamentary, but I don't think anybody in this province would agree that the Liberals ran on selling off Hydro. I think that was a safe way of putting it, Speaker, and I appreciate your patience with that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a fair thing to say.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's a fair thing to say.

So here we have, once again, the Liberals putting a plan out there. Some of it is in the budget; some of it isn't. Some of it is in words; a lot of it is not in the numbers. It doesn't add up when you throw in whatever numbers they think they need for their drug plan, because those numbers aren't in the budget. We don't know what that is. They haven't budgeted for the Ring of Fire. It's not in the budget. Yet, here they are saying that it's in the budget and that they're going to invest in the Ring of Fire. There's so much that's in question, and they should have to answer those questions, yet they're moving to shut down debate. They don't want the people of Ontario to have a say. They don't want the elected representatives of those people to have a say.

Today we had a rally with families from across the province. I don't think some people recognize the gravity of those people coming to Queen's Park. They're parents, and some of them are themselves people with developmental disabilities, some also with physical disabilities. They managed to get all the way here to Toronto, some of them coming from four, five, six or seven hours away. They came here to tell this government that this budget does nothing for them—nothing for them.

There's a big gap between when someone is 17 and when they turn 18. They can sit and languish on a wait-list indefinitely, whether that's for funding or whether that's for supportive housing. This budget doesn't address it. They're not fooling the people of Ontario. They're not fooling the service providers that actually help those people with developmental disabilities. They get that there is nothing in this budget to actually address the indefinite wait-list for Passport funding. There's nothing in here to truly open up appropriate supportive housing for these people.

Yet, with all these people coming to Queen's Park, talking about what isn't in the budget and what supports

they're not getting—and some of this funding they're saying they're releasing for developmental services, they said they were releasing in 2014. They're re-announcements, just like the majority of this budget. What they're trying to do on the other side is silence the people who showed up here today to rally. They're trying to silence them and rush through a budget bill that really is not in the best interests of the people in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate. Second call: Further debate. Last call: Further debate.

Seeing none, Minister Naqvi has moved government notice of number 10, relating to allocation of time on Bill 127, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes. Is it the pleasure of the House that this motion carry?

I heard a no.

All those in favour will please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

I believe the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The member from St. Catharines has given me a deferral. Pursuant to standing order 28(h), they request a deferral. This vote will be taken tomorrow after question period.

Vote deferred.

SAFER SCHOOL ZONES ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ACCRUE DES ZONES D'ÉCOLE

Mr. Del Duca moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act in respect of speed limits in municipalities and other matters / Projet de loi 65, Loi modifiant le Code de la route relativement aux limites de vitesse dans les municipalités et à d'autres questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Del Duca.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm very happy to have an opportunity this afternoon to spend a little bit of time, time that I will be sharing with my friend and colleague the Attorney General, with respect to the third reading of Bill 65.

This is legislation that, a number of weeks ago, I was very proud to have brought forward with respect to making very critical sections of our roads, namely school zones and community safety zones, safer for some of our most vulnerable road users. In addition to that, we also, in this legislation, for example, move forward with making it administratively easier for those communities that wish to participate in our red-light camera program, another mechanism that has been now in existence for a number of years that's also designed to help with respect to road safety, which is a critical issue for the Ministry of Transportation.

I have said many times in this place and elsewhere that road safety, generally speaking, is the Ministry of Transportation's top priority. In particular, we know that in communities right around Ontario, the safety of our most vulnerable road users—pedestrians, cyclists, particularly senior citizens, the elderly as they're walking, and also school-aged children—that it was so important for us to move forward with this legislation, which, I should highlight, was requested by a number of municipalities, including municipalities like Ottawa, like the city of Toronto, and others, including my home region, York region.

I think it's also important for me to note that nothing in Bill 65 compels a municipality to move forward with any of the initiatives that I've just referenced or will reference in a second. It simply empowers them. If they want to take advantage of what we call automated speed enforcement or photo radar, they could do so if this legislation were to pass. Hopefully when it passes, they could do so, but only in school zones and community safety zones, as an example.

It would also empower them, should they choose, to lower their default speed limit. We've heard from a number of municipalities that have told us, as have many of our road safety partners, that speed, particularly in areas like school zones and community safety zones, is very, very dangerous. Of course, I think that's fairly intuitive.

I want to stress, as I did at other points in debate, that when it comes to Bill 65, the motivation pure and simple for this government is to work with our municipal partners, law enforcement and other road safety partners to make sure that we empower them so that collectively we can provide for safer roads around schools and in community safety zones.

There has been a lot of back and forth throughout the debate here in this chamber and at committee regarding this particular legislation. I have to admit I'm a little bit surprised that members of the Conservative caucus would have taken this opportunity to attempt to, in the first case, confuse the issue with respect to the legislation itself, and then, when they realized they had taken an untenable position, try and backtrack and force other initiatives into the legislation, initiatives that I'm happy to talk about. In fact, I've had the opportunity to speak to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex and provide him with correspondence, because I recognize that the thrust of some of their initiatives are things that the Ministry of Transportation is quite happy to work with them on.

But, tactically, I have to say that it is really unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition and members of his caucus, both here in this chamber and at committee, would take this opportunity to try and suggest that Bill 65 contained provisions that in fact it did not really and truly contain, and to move forward in a particularly regrettable way.

1610

The good news is that we find ourselves here back at third reading on this legislation. I have to say, and I will say it: Throughout the debate at second reading, I heard the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, the member

from Nipissing and the members from a number of other communities represented by Conservative MPPs debate extensively, as they should in this place, on this bill. In all of those cases, I heard references to a cash grab, I heard references to photo radar, I heard references to historic situations that existed in this province prior to 1995. Throughout the entirety of the debate, both myself and my staff were only able to find a couple of instances in which the notion of putting cameras on school buses to catch those who are not adhering to the rules was actually mentioned.

That's not to say that at an existential, philosophical level we disagree—that I disagree, as the minister—with moving forward in that direction. I've said that in this House, I've said it to media, and I've said it, frankly, to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. What I do find remarkable—and it helps to prove my point around the tactical maneuvering on the part of the Leader of the Opposition and his transportation critic, the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, when they realized that they were in a position for which, really and truly, in the public's eye, there would be no defence. At the end of the day, how can you be opposed to more safety for school children and for the elderly? I congratulate members of the NDP caucus, and in particular, the transportation critic from the NDP, the member from Niagara Falls, for taking a far more enlightened perspective with respect to this legislation and realizing what it was really all about.

I don't want to relitigate this entire matter. It's already been through committee. But I am proud of this legislation, and I just want to stress that it's unfortunate that throughout debate, members of the Conservative caucus really focused their remarks on one particular aspect, almost dogmatically on this aspect, that they were so opposed to photo radar and that this manoeuvre was merely a cash grab.

When it got to committee, they suddenly found religion, as the saying goes, and tried to position themselves on the side of the angels. I don't think anyone in the province of Ontario was fooled. I certainly wasn't. The good news is, should we pass this legislation, I've committed that my ministry will work really closely with all of our partners and municipalities as we consult over the next number of months. Frankly, I invited the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex to work with us on that consultation, and I'm happy to do that, to make sure we do land in the right place and that we link the infraction in the Highway Traffic Act to the technology that exists as it relates to school buses. I look forward to working with the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex and all of our other partners to make sure that we get there.

I just wanted to make sure it was clear and on the record that it's been disappointing for me to witness the spectacle that Patrick Brown, the Leader of the Opposition, and his henchmen have put forward at committee on this particular bill.

I want to spend my remaining time, if I might—I've said this at various points in debate, not just here but elsewhere. I talked about this as it relates to road safety.

Again, I want to stress, we are not compelling any municipality to do a particular thing, but it is important for me to recognize that we have heard from mayors, we have heard from regional chairs, we have heard from councillors, and we have certainly heard from all of our partners in the road safety realm about the importance of making sure that we move forward with these measures.

With my remaining couple of minutes, I do want to say, in particular to my colleague who is going to speak just after me, the member from Ottawa Centre, the Attorney General and our government House leader, he is someone, not long after I became the Minister of Transportation back in 2014, who spoke to me about the importance of making sure that we worked with our communities to empower them, to strengthen some of the rules and regulations around this. I know this member in particular, obviously representing downtown Ottawa, where, not unlike communities like Leaside here in the city of Toronto and elsewhere around the province, there are particular and well-founded concerns on the part of parents who unfortunately witness too many motorists flying through the streets of their communities, of their neighbourhoods, near schools and in community safety zones—the Attorney General, the member from Ottawa Centre, I know feels passionately about the mandate that he received locally from the people of Ottawa Centre on these issues. He was a strong and staunch and persistent advocate—and I say that in a complimentary way—a persistent advocate with respect to these measures. I know he'll be speaking in just a moment, but I wanted to thank him publicly here on the record for his advocacy and for being such a strong champion of these kinds of initiatives.

The last thing I will say about this is that a number of weeks ago, Premier Wynne, myself, the mayor of Toronto and law enforcement partners all convened in Leaside at an elementary school, in a particular neighbourhood of Leaside that witnessed and experienced and had to, very unfortunately, absorb its own serious tragedy around this issue. There was a very young girl who, not that many years ago, was unfortunately killed in her neighbourhood because of someone who didn't stop appropriately at a stop sign.

I'm not going to suggest that this legislation will fix 100% of these situations, 100% in every single circumstance. But to listen to the parents who were there that day—teachers, parents, law enforcement and others from the road safety community—talk very poignantly about what they experienced in that neighbourhood, I think on this one I can speak for the Premier, and I'll certainly speak for myself: It was encouraging to hear their story. It was heartbreaking, but it was encouraging because there was clear recognition in that room the day we announced these initiatives and that we would be going forward with introducing Bill 65—it was clear that we were moving in the right direction, that we were adding one more set of tools to the tool kit, as the saying goes, to help our municipal partners, but most importantly, to help those individuals who rely on the Ministry of

Transportation, rely on the Attorney General, rely on our Premier and on our government to make sure that when it comes to guaranteeing that we're going to find creative ways to improve road safety, we actually step up to the plate, because we have an obligation to do so.

I sincerely hope throughout the rest of debate this afternoon that we will hear from members of the Conservative caucus that they've seen the light, that they will support Bill 65, like we are and like I believe the members of the NDP caucus are as well.

With that, I thank you very much for having the opportunity to address you on Bill 65 this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It's a great honour for me to speak on Bill 65 in this third reading debate as the member of provincial Parliament for Ottawa Centre. It's that perspective, the perspective that I have learned and appreciated from my community, that I want to present today.

Before I do that, I want to compliment the Minister of Transportation, the member from Vaughan, for bringing this very important initiative. He is right: As soon as he was sworn in as the Minister of Transportation, I had the opportunity to sit down with him and talk about some of the concerns around my community, around people speeding in neighbourhood streets in the downtown community that I represent, to talk about our school zones, and to speak to instances that I've heard from moms and dads in my community directly. He was attentive; he was thoughtful. Right away, our conversation went to possible solutions that are available. It was a few conversations like that that we had together, aided by his staff, where we started talking about different options and solutions that are available to ensure that our communities, particularly our municipalities, have the tools available to them, have the suite of options available to them to make our streets safe.

I think we both agreed right from the get-go that for any type of measure to be successful, we have to empower local communities. We have to really give the tools to our municipalities, as opposed to bringing a sort of heavy hand from the province, because each community is different. Each municipality is different. This is a diverse province and it's important that we respect that diversity and ensure that we give municipalities the powers equally so that they can then decide what works best for them.

I think what you see here, Speaker, is a tremendous amount of work that has been done by the Minister of Transportation, the member for Vaughan, and his ministry, with some really practical solutions—the result of significant consultations, even before the bill was presented, with municipalities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, AMO.

As I said here earlier, my aim is to bring the perspective of my community that I have the great privilege of representing. As I have said before in this House, one of the great joys I have as the MPP for Ottawa Centre is to

knock on doors every weekend on Saturdays in my community. That allows me to have regular conversations with my constituents on matters that are important to them. One of the issues that I continue to hear, and one of the issues that I used to hear a lot about, is the concern around people speeding in residential neighbourhoods. We're not talking about main thoroughfares; we're talking about residential streets.

I have the great privilege of representing downtown Ottawa, with some incredible neighbourhoods. They're densely populated. We're seeing a fair bit of intensification taking place. More and more, people are choosing to live in vibrant neighbourhoods like the Glebe or Westboro or Carleton Heights or Old Ottawa South, which are located in my riding, just to name a few. What we're finding is that as young families are moving in and enjoying the downtown living, you also attract a lot of traffic, especially people going to work, and we see people speeding. The question becomes: What can you do to slow people down?

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We have seen parents and community associations taking up activities like “drive slow” campaigns that we see a lot across the province, where they've made their own signs. In our case in Ottawa, the city of Ottawa, through the public health office, became part of that as well to, again, remind drivers in residential streets around school zones that there are lives at risk. We've got young children whom we encourage to walk to school or use their bikes, and it is up to us to protect them. We have seniors who are more active now and are out there in the communities. We need to protect them.

It was in the last election in 2014 that I made a commitment to my community that, if I were privileged enough to be re-elected on their behalf, reducing speed limits in residential streets from 50 kilometres an hour to something less—like 40 or 30—was something I was going to advocate on their behalf. That was one of the important mandates that was given to me by my community.

I'm really proud that here we are on third reading of Bill 65 with measures like giving municipalities the power to be able to reduce speed limits on residential streets from 50 kilometres an hour to 40 or 30 as part of this. The fact that we've got photo radar as a tool for school zones and community safety zones is part of this initiative. And we are making it easy for municipalities to use red-light cameras, also, to make intersections safe.

All of these three measures, Speaker, I can tell you, are very much supported by my community. Since the bill was tabled, I have been constantly communicating with my constituents, letting them know every step of the way the process that is undertaken. I can tell you, I continue to get more and more encouragement and more support for Bill 65. In fact, the questions I often get are how quickly this bill can pass and how quickly the community associations and our residents can start working with the city of Ottawa so that they can have

their neighbourhoods declared neighbourhoods with lower speed limits.

I'm also quite encouraged to note that the city of Ottawa, with the support of our mayor, Jim Watson, is also very supportive of Bill 65. In fact, I had a great opportunity to work with the city of Ottawa in bringing forward a motion at city council asking the province to take exactly these measures, both in terms of the power to reduce speed limits on residential streets and also to be able to have photo radar in school zones and community safety zones. So we actually have a motion passed by the city of Ottawa council that was sent to the government, both to the Premier and the Minister of Transportation—I believe I was copied on that correspondence—asking to do the same.

They have remained steadfast in their support for Bill 65. In fact, members who were on the committee would recall that we had six city councillors from Ottawa who presented, some of them in person right here at Queen's Park and the others through teleconference. All six of them expressed their strong support for this bill and were able to, quite eloquently, of course, answer the questions that were put forward by members of the committee.

I want to thank councillors Riley Brockington, Keith Egli, Jeff Leiper, Catherine McKenney, Tobi Nussbaum and Mathieu Fleury for the work they do at home in our community in Ottawa and for taking the time to either come down to Queen's Park or present by telephone on this very important measure. They were all kind enough to give me some credit, but it's a partnership under which we work together to represent our residents.

I have highlighted that just so that members know that a municipality like Ottawa, which is the second-largest municipality in the province, is very much supportive of this bill. In fact, in anticipation of this legislation being passed by this House, the city of Ottawa has already started working on their policy guidelines on how to declare certain residential streets around 30 kilometres an hour. They've actually started doing their side of the work in hopes that this bill will pass into law so that they can immediately, once it comes into force, start doing the work necessary to make our neighbourhood streets even safer. I just wanted to raise that point.

I also want to, again, make sure to thank members of my community: members from community associations; individual parents who came to see me; people who I met at the door, people like Donna Chiarelli and Catherine James-McGuinty; members of community associations, like Wellington Village Community Association, the Glebe Community Association, and the Carlington Community Association, again just to name a few; and on and on and on. They all very much wholeheartedly support this legislation and again have been inquiring as to when this bill will pass into law.

One of the other things I can tell you that my residents are very clear about, Speaker, is that none of these measures amount to a cash grab. Their point is very clear, and I wholeheartedly agree, that following the law is what we are supposed to do. That's why we created the

laws. If you break the law, there have to be consequences attached to it. If you are breaking the speed limit in a school zone and then you get caught by a photo radar, by no stretch of the imagination or definition is that a cash grab. Guess what? You broke the law. The best way not to pay that fine is not to break the law.

Speaker, I just wanted to make that point very, very clear, that this is not a cash grab. These are tools in the tool kit for municipalities to make sure that they continue to keep their school zones, their community zones and their residential streets safe. If somebody is going to break the law, then they're going to have to face the consequences. In this instance, breaking the law could mean losing the life of a child or an elderly person in our community. That's something, as members of this Legislature, that should be absolutely unacceptable to us.

In conclusion, I just want to say that I am very excited that we are at a point where this bill is up for third reading. I want to thank the minister. I want to thank other members in this House who have been supporting this bill. This is a step in the right direction in making sure that we are making our neighbourhoods safe.

I can tell you that my community of Ottawa Centre thanks this Legislature and the government for bringing in this important measure. This is going to make a marked difference in my community around our schools and our neighbourhood streets. I just cannot wait, Speaker, to share the good news.

I hope that the third reading won't take too long so we can pass this bill and get on with the steps to implement this bill through MTO, because we cannot come to the day soon enough where we make our schools and our residential streets safe. Thank you very much, Speaker, for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today and speak on Bill 65, the Safer School Zones Act.

We didn't name this bill; the government did. They're calling it the Safer School Zones Act. I think that people at home would assume that that meant we were only debating safe practices within school zones, but unfortunately this bill includes photo radar anywhere in the province on roads with a maximum speed of 80. It wasn't originally that—

Mr. Michael Harris: It was 90.

Mrs. Gila Martow: It was 90? Anyhow, there are many roads across the province that have no schools anywhere in the vicinity, and the vast majority of Ontarians do not want to see photo radar. They understand that there could be police officers who pull them over if they are speeding, but they prefer to see that the person who is driving the car is punished if they are speeding. Often-times businesses or families lend cars to friends or relatives; they do not want to get speeding tickets for an infraction caused by somebody other than themselves driving their cars.

Why is this legislation expanding across the province, not just in school zones? If it should expand out of the

roads, we have suggested that there should be cameras to catch people, what they call a blow-by, driving by school buses with the lights flashing and the arms out.

There could be discussion about children who are too small to be in a regular seat belt, that they need a booster seat and that there's somebody checking, because that happened to me when I carpooled many kids in kindergarten and nursery, and I had to have three in a booster seat and two in a car seat. Mr. Speaker, if you can just picture me surviving all those years dealing with all of that.

1630

People want to see the government focusing on getting the Yonge subway up to York region and things like that. Thank you, Speaker, and I'm sure we're going to hear a lot more from many members of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's certainly my pleasure to rise today to speak to the bill before us, the Safer School Zones Act. I can tell you, as a former school board trustee and vice-chair of the public school board in Windsor, that this is a welcome piece of legislation, not just by school boards, but by municipalities.

I remember specifically a city councillor—he is now our mayor, but he was a city councillor at the time—came to me and asked me to help him get some sort of traffic-calming measures around a school in the riding in an area that we shared, because what was happening was, regardless of there being stop signs—they weren't able to get a crossing guard at one particular crossing—people were blowing through the stop sign while there were kids and their families crossing the street.

There were residents who lived around this school who said that in the morning and at dismissal, they would close their curtains and not look outside, because they were terrified that a child was going to get hurt by a distracted driver or someone who chose to run a stop sign. School boards and municipalities want some way—they want the power—to be able to find the people who are running stop signs or speeding through school zones, not obeying traffic signs, not obeying speed limits. They want the ability to track these people, to somehow hold them to account for their decision.

Imagine if a child got injured or killed. I cannot wrap my head around—neither can many people in this province—why any party would not support something like this that would enable municipalities to hold people to account when it comes to the safety of our children. I want to note that the Conservatives, at second reading of this bill, didn't support the bill, and clearly didn't support the measures in here that municipalities and school boards have asked for. I certainly hope that now they change direction and support what this bill has in it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, I've had the opportunity to support our minister throughout 10 hours of debate on

Bill 65, and also throughout many hours in committee. We heard from 24 individuals and groups. We heard from mayors, councillors and chiefs of police. We heard from community safety experts. We heard from teachers and parents. They all support Bill 65. They want to have the use of automated speed enforcement. They want default speed limits, and they want easier access to red-light cameras. Speaker, this is about slowing down speeders and making our roads safer.

I want to add that I was very impressed during our committee work with the member for Niagara Falls. He spoke very eloquently. He was the voice of reason. We're all in agreement that we need to empower municipalities and give them the tools that they're looking for to make our streets safer.

The only ones who seem to be on the wrong side of the street with Bill 65 are the PC Party. After cries of "cash grab" or threats that photo radar is returning to provincial highways—both of which, by the way, are not true—at the eleventh hour, as a desperate attempt to obstruct this bill, they filed over 300 motions. This is an eight-page bill.

I could go on about the absurdity of their position, but I want to end with the words of Tracey O'Toole. Listen to the words of Tracey O'Toole; she is the principal at Allenby public school on Avenue Road. She came before our committee and she said, "Three years ago, two teachers at our school were struck by a vehicle and were seriously injured as they walked across Avenue Road.... Their injuries resulted in the end of their teaching careers. I keep this in mind each time out of the eight times"—so far—"this year that I've run out of the office... hoping that there isn't another member of our community who has been seriously injured."

Photo radar in school zones is what we need, so we have a moral imperative—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'm pleased to rise to talk to this particular bill. First of all, no one in this Legislature is against safety, especially as it pertains to either children or seniors. As a result of that, you have your school zones and you have your community safety zones.

I just want to clarify something. Our friends across the aisle said that at the last minute we submitted an amendment, which was actually tabled as Bill 94, pertaining to school safety and video evidence being captured and being able to prosecute offenders who pass school buses while lights are flashing. We heard in committee what was being presented by authorities from the Ministry of Transportation. We went back and we then wanted to ask permission—unanimous consent—to have our amendment read again, but it was flatly turned down. But we had made those changes, which I think would be to the favour of the government. However, it didn't get put in, and unfortunately—

Mr. Michael Harris: Sadly.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It is sad. That amendment isn't there. We're hoping to bring forward Bill 94 at a later date to ensure that the safety of our children is imperative. Of course, I was hoping that Bill 94 would have been called sooner than later so that it would reach royal assent, it would become law and we'd have better safety laws protecting our children, so that those who pass school buses with lights flashing and stop arm extended—the video evidence would capture that, and it would be ready to go come September 1.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes questions and comments for this round.

The Minister of Transportation now has the opportunity to respond.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the members from Thornhill, Windsor West, Kitchener Centre and Chatham–Kent–Essex for their comments after the debate that I have participated in.

I actually do want to start by paying tribute to the member from Kitchener Centre. She is also the parliamentary assistant, as she mentioned, at the Ministry of Transportation, and she did a phenomenal job, as she always has, working very closely with me and my team on this particular legislation. So I do want to thank her publicly here in this chamber for the work she did.

I also want to mention the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. He and I have had conversations about his concern regarding using technology, using cameras around school buses. I want to thank him because I do believe, in my heart of hearts, that his heart is in the right place. As I mentioned in debate this afternoon, I look forward to having the opportunity to work with him as we go forward, should this legislation pass, with greater consultation to make sure we get that particular piece right.

I want to thank the member from Windsor and the NDP caucus for their support for this legislation and for being the voice of reason when it comes to the opposition on this particular bill.

But I think what we saw here this afternoon, when the member from Thornhill spoke, in particular, is exactly what the challenge is with the Conservative caucus on this legislation. On the one hand, throughout debate at second reading, we were told, as the Attorney General mentioned, that this is a cash grab, that it's about re-introducing photo radar on highways. We brought forward an amendment to scope the speed limit for the community safety zones in which the technology can be used so that it cannot be deployed on a municipally owned freeway, expressway or highway.

Then today, a second ago, the member from Thornhill said that if you're going to use photo radar, it's not appropriate because you're only going to catch the person who owns the car, not the driver of the vehicle. And she immediately follows it up by saying, "But you should put cameras on school buses so that if somebody blows by, the owner of the car that blows by gets a ticket."

There's a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of that member and the Conservative caucus around this

legislation. I hope they get their act straight and support Bill 65, because it is the right thing to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: Bill 65 is back up for third reading today. I think it's important to get it right out from the get-go that the Ontario PC caucus, led by our leader, Patrick Brown, the member for Simcoe North, absolutely, 100% supports initiatives that keep our kids safe. We're all parents here. I hope to be joined, perhaps later in the hour, by my own family. Of course, I've got a five-year-old, Murphy, a three-year-old, Lincoln, and Rosy's just about to turn two. Murphy, obviously, just started going to school this year. At each and every opportunity we talk about safety on our roads, we instantly think of our loved ones: family, friends, but of course our immediate families. I'm proud of the fact that since 2011 as MPP for Kitchener–Conestoga, this caucus and our leader have supported many, many road safety initiatives that in fact had been, fortunately, adopted by the government, but more importantly, the government of the past led with many safety initiatives. I hope to get into some of those this afternoon as we talk about Bill 65, but I really think it's important.

1640

Nobody believes—nobody believes for a minute—when either the government or the third party suggest that the Ontario PC caucus doesn't support keeping our kids safe. They know that's nonsense. That's the problem, perhaps, with this place: Partisan politics always gets injected into divisive debates on good or bad measures. I think it's all-important and -encompassing to know—and perhaps I'll get into the role of Her Majesty's loyal opposition later, but I just want to make that abundantly clear.

Again, like I said, nobody believes the nonsense that you hear about Patrick Brown and the Ontario PCs not being supportive of safety initiatives on our roads. Nonsense. So I just want to reiterate how we will continue to be absolutely supportive of keeping our kids, our families and our loved ones safe on Ontario highways.

The point of this bill, Bill 65, the Safer School Zones Act—we were asking that if you were going to name a bill and bring a bill forward—and I know that it was light on substance to begin with; I know it was only eight or so pages. This was really the first opportunity that the Minister of Transportation has had as minister. Bill 31 was, of course, introduced by his colleague from Toronto Centre, so he adopted that bill—but a bill of his own, to really have a staple piece of legislation to call his own, and this was his first attempt at it. I just don't know that I would want this to be my legacy if I was in his role, but it will be his, to have a piece of legislation that—great bill title—lacked a lot of the substance that I think we actually need to truly keep our kids safe, our schools safe.

I have to ask our listeners to pay close attention, because this trail that the government has led us and the people of Ontario down as they've pushed this legislation forward is a path full of diversions—it really is—and

mixed messages, all in the effort to convince the public that Bill 65 is really all about school safety. I'll get into this in much more depth as I move forward, but to begin, if it were all about student safety, the government members would have adopted our amendment to improve the bill through doubling fines in school zones.

I'll give you an example. After this bill becomes law, you're going to have photo radar in school zones and community safety zones. School zones are defined; community safety zones are not. But if you are subject to a fine in either of those, if you were given it in a community safety zone, the fine would actually be doubled. You would be fined double. If that same vehicle, moments later, was passing through at the same speed in a school zone, the fine would actually be half. If it's all about school safety, then why is the fine less in a school zone than it is in a community safety zone?

We said, during clause-by-clause—which really is the only opportunity that an opposition party has. There are no consultations done with the opposition prior to a bill being introduced. We talk about it at second reading debate. We had a minimal amount of time to do that. Clause-by-clause is that opportunity. We said, “Look, let's make the fines equal in a school zone to what they are in a community safety zone.”

Can anybody guess how they voted on that amendment? No guesses, but I'll tell you quickly: They said no to it. They said no.

Again, if it's about student safety, we asked, “Would you adopt our amendment to improve the bill through the use of radar speed signs?”

Interjection: What did they say?

Mr. Michael Harris: I'll get into that in a minute, what they said.

These radar speed signs now are being deployed in municipalities right across our province. The city of Toronto has an excellent program to deploy these signs in every ward, I believe, in Toronto.

In my own community, the region of Waterloo, several municipalities—Woolwich and Wilmot—are deploying these speed signs that would give a driver instant notice as to what their speed is—instantly, with great results in the pilot project done by the city of Toronto.

Unlike, perhaps, a photo radar ticket showing up in your mailbox four weeks later, you're going to know right then and there what that speed limit is that you're driving. We proposed that to the committee: “Let's roll these speed signs out across the province and provide resources to municipalities.” What did the Liberal members say in committee? They said no. They said no. They said no.

So we proposed another amendment that would have adopted our call to improve the bill through taking aim at school bus blow-bys. I'm going to have a much greater opportunity near the end of the debate, or mid-debate, to talk about that specific safety initiative. It's an important safety measure that's been on the order paper here for perhaps a year, maybe even longer: debated twice, approved unanimously by all three political parties in the Legislature; brought forward by my colleague from

Chatham-Kent-Essex. I think it's perhaps one of the most important safety initiatives currently before Parliament here in Ontario, brought forward by my colleague, to truly keep kids safe. What did they do? They said no.

I will say I was happy to have the support of my colleague from the third party. We didn't have a lot of chance to chat throughout the committee. I know that was a compliment given to him by the government. We would obviously have loved to have had more rigorous debate and discussion from all three political parties, but I will say I appreciate the acknowledgement that this was an important initiative, and the third party adopted and supported our call for that. We want to thank them for that. They voted yes, but the government said no.

Again, if it were about student safety, they would have adopted our amendments to improve the bill through defining community safety zones. We're a bit in the weeds here, but school safety zones are clearly defined in the Highway Traffic Act. Everybody knows exactly what they are: a specific radius around a school; that area is defined as a school zone. “Community safety zones”—ambiguous. Basically, by bylaw a municipality can designate any area a community safety zone. We felt there was a necessity to be clear and consistent right across the province. Like school zones in the Highway Traffic Act, let's clearly define what a community safety zone is. Do you want to know how they voted on that, Speaker? They said no. They said no to that important initiative.

The Attorney General, the member for Ottawa—we heard many of the local officials from Ottawa come down and speak to committee. I was there and heard them reiterate the fact that they would be supportive of revenues that were generated through the use of photo radar to be used and directed specifically for road safety measures. We thought, “Do you know what? That's a good idea. Let's allocate and redirect any of the revenues generated from photo radar directly back into road safety initiatives and measures.” We proposed an amendment—because that's the opportunity we get at clause-by-clause—to suggest, “Let's direct the revenues from photo radar directly to safety initiatives on our roads.” That's one of only 40 amendments that we actually debated—one of only 40.

I know they have a difficult time with math over there. They talk about “200 and some”; I read an article now, 219, and I heard 300—a difficult time with math over there. But if you look at it, just around 40 amendments were actually debated in committee.

Reinvesting revenues back into road safety: We proposed it, debated it, and guess what they said? They said no. They said, “No. We don't like that one.”

You know, we continue to hear this campaign of blow-by smears against official opposition members in an effort to distract from the reality that they find hard to admit. That truth is just this: that Bill 65 could have been all about school safety. We had told them time and again, “If you keep it about school zones, we're with you 100%—100%, we're with you,” but they didn't. It could have been about all of us working together for the benefit

of our children, but instead the Liberals chose to turn this opportunity to enhance school safety into a political wedge to force photo radar back onto roadways across Ontario. The more we saw them protest and try to divert that unwanted attention, the more we saw them stand in the way of clear safety enhancements and the more it became clear that, while Bill 65 could have been all about student safety, it unfortunately wasn't.

1650

I think one of our first clues to the Liberal approach of diversion and misleadership came just hours before our first committee meeting to go through clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. That morning, in response to a well-written piece by Antonella Artuso of the Toronto Sun with the front page headline "Under the Radar," the Premier took to the airwaves to suggest the bill would not indeed allow photo radar on municipal roads, despite the fact that it most obviously did: "That's not going to happen and you and I know it," Premier Wynne said. "It's about keeping kids safe." That was followed by a report in the Sun indicating that "Premier Kathleen Wynne guarantees a new bill before the Legislature on photo radar will not be used anywhere but in school zones." That's what she said.

Then, it was the transportation minister's turn indicating, "I think that the Conservative Party putting forward the notion that somehow municipalities would embark on a very bizarre approach to expanding community safety zones, that they can use photo radar sort of at will is conflating the issue." That's what he said. Yes, it would have been conflating the issue if the bill did not allow the expansion of photo radar, through community safety zone designations, as the Premier and minister wanted us to believe.

But the facts were laid bare that afternoon when ministry legal counsel David Milner reported that, indeed, the bill could be used to expand photo radar onto roads outside of school zones right across the province. As Mr. Milner states in Hansard, "If the road is a municipal road, and the area with that road in it has been designated as a community safety zone, then it would be open to the use of the speed enforcement cameras"—a.k.a. photo radar.

Now, we felt that the bill really truly should be called what it actually does, and suggested that we rename the bill "the Ontario photo radar act, 2016." I thought that was a fair suggestion. They obviously said no to that one as well.

But, you know, Speaker, it doesn't get much clearer than that. As much as the Liberal members attempted to change the channel and try to get us to believe otherwise, the fact is that Bill 65, at first and second reading, allowed for photo radar on municipal expressways. The bill, at second reading, allowed for photo radar on major expressways, parkways and highways right across the province.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Michael Harris: Of course they didn't want you to hear that. That's not what they wanted you to hear. I think, again, effective—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock.

Continue.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker. Again, all through committee, I had encouraged the members to take some time in the evening, and read up on the Westminster system that we have here, part of our democracy, our parliamentary system, to truly understand what it's all about. We had—and have—an opportunity during second reading debate to, obviously, present our case on some issues or problems that we have with the bill. We had to show our intention to say, "Look, the bill, as is, isn't where we think it should be." We objected to that, and we sent a message to the government to say, "In committee, we need to fix this bill to get it right. We're going to say no to you at that opportunity, so that you heed our call and listen to our opposition." That's an important part of democracy.

I really think this is a pressing opportunity now—I know we've got 40-something minutes left. Back in 1949, Mr. Diefenbaker spoke about the role of our parliamentary system. He said:

"If Parliament is to be preserved as a living institution His"—obviously "his" at the time—"Majesty's loyal opposition"—now "hers," of course—"must fearlessly perform its functions. When it properly discharges them the preservation of our freedom is assured. The reading of history proves that freedom always dies when criticism ends. It upholds and maintains the rights of minorities against majorities. It must be vigilant against oppression and unjust invasions by the cabinet of the rights of the people. It should supervise all expenditures and prevent over expenditure by exposing to the light of public opinion wasteful expenditures or worse. It finds fault; it suggests amendments; it asks questions and elicits information; it arouses, educates and molds public opinion by voice and vote. It must scrutinize every action by the government and in doing so prevents the short-cuts through democratic procedure that governments like to make.

"Parliament is a place where in full discussion freedom is preserved, where one side advances arguments and the other examines them and where decisions are arrived at after passing through the crucible of public discussion.

"The opposition that discharges its responsibilities becomes the responsible outlet of intelligent criticism. Indeed, most, if not all, authorities on constitutional government agree that Britain's freedom from civil war since the development of the party system is due in the main to the fact that the opposition has provided an outlet and a safety valve for opposition."

I want to go back to why this is important. I mentioned during committee on Bill 65, the Safer School Zones Act, that this is part of the process, that by saying "no" during

second reading, we sent a message to the government that there were problems with the bill. Had we all just kind of held hands and sung Kumbaya—what's the fun in that? That doesn't advance the cause of Ontarians.

We are sent here, obviously, by our communities. I always suggest that if my community wanted a member of the government, they would have elected one. But they didn't: They elected me, and I thank them for that. My job is now to perform the duties of the official opposition, and I will live each and every day for those duties to the fullest extent I possibly can.

Now, I want to go back. Diefenbaker said, "The government tends to regard the opposition as the brake on a car going uphill whereas the opposition thinks the car is going downhill."

Of course, he says, "It is human nature for governments to find the opposition distasteful and the longer governments are in power the more they become convinced that they govern by divine right and that their decisions are infallible." That sounds an awful lot like where we're at today, Speaker. "Only a strong opposition can prevent a cabinet with a commanding majority from ruling without regard to the rights of minorities. Independence is not looked for among most private members supporting the government, for individual independence more often than not denies personal preferment. As for collective independence by the members supporting the government, the cabinet is master by holding over its majority the threat of dissolution."

Look, I just think it is important. He said also, "Countries cannot be fully free until they have an organized opposition. It is not a long step from the absence of an organized opposition to a complete dictatorship."

You know what? I think you guys get the picture of where I'm going with this. This is the job that we have. This is what this side represents. When we're elected, we come in here, and we hear about the sculptures that are painted in the Legislature here—

Interjection: The eagle.

Mr. Michael Harris: The eagle, of course. And I just think that, again, hopefully members of the government get an opportunity to sit on our side. I know that the member from St. Catharines, obviously a long-standing member, gets what we have to do on this side. He understands that. But many of the members over there have never experienced a day in opposition. A small part of me says that I hope that they don't, but they might. After the next election, they might serve here—"don't" being that they won't come back at all; I guess you get that now. But it's important. It's really important.

I've got to get back onto Bill 65, because we only have 39 minutes left. One of the committee members even held a news conference where he spouted the spin that moved even further from the truth as the committee deliberations progressed and Liberal members became more desperate to label us. He said that much of the spin surrounded the fact that the PCs were filibustering the bill by introducing over 300 amendments, and the amendments would remove roads that had schools on

them from potential photo radar usage. Of course, Speaker, none of that is true at all.

1700

While the Liberals wanted to go on about our introduction of 300 amendments to slow down committee, the truth is that we saw just over 40 PC amendments that were actually introduced and debated—only 40. While the Liberals wanted to go on about our draft amendments taking away photo radar from school zone roads, the truth is that while amendments were drafted to remove specific roads from photo radar—that were not introduced—they specifically excluded areas with school zones from the restriction. Therefore, at no time did amendments attempt to remove Bill 65's photo radar provisions from school zones.

And while the Liberals wanted to go on and on about our filibustering, the truth is that clause-by-clause at committee ran for a total of about just over six hours. That's not an extraordinary length of time for a bill, by any comparison, and clearly not delayed by filibusters as the government accuses. They had an entire news conference based on these mistruths. Of course—fake spin, fake news—they even had parents on the podium who were misled to believe that they were targeting roads with schools on them for removal of photo radar. That's completely false, just false.

While the media was wary enough to see through the ruse, they continued to spout their prepared lines to smear the opposition, which was simply just trying to do its job. Just because the Liberal members—whether it be the minister, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence who directed the press conference or, of course, my neighbouring committee member from Kitchener Centre—repeat a mistruth enough times, it doesn't make it true.

The funny thing is, while that press conference I referenced was designed to target the opposition, the members present spent the media Q&A answering questions with regard to their support—or actual lack thereof—for our amendments to address school bus blow-bys. I want to talk about that, Speaker, because I think that that is an extremely important opportunity here. The media understood that if, indeed, Bill 65 was focused on student safety, as the government has led us to believe, surely it would make sense to support a key amendment, based on the twice-introduced private member's bill of our colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex, which would protect children getting on and off school buses.

The Chair of the committee thought it made sense enough to rule our amendment in order for committee consideration. I think that is an important note to make. A variety of amendments were put forward. Of course, being from Kitchener–Waterloo, roundabouts are a prevalent item; there are 40-plus roundabouts in our community. One of the first things when elected as an MPP, one of the first emails or pieces of correspondence I got, was from a parent whose child was hit at a roundabout near a school. Roundabouts are not even mentioned in the Highway Traffic Act at all.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Harris: It's a municipal initiative.

Roundabouts are right across the province, and I said, "Look, if we're talking about school safety, let's actually create rules on roundabouts and embed them in the Highway Traffic Act," because as an MPP from Kitchener-Waterloo—I know the member from Toronto Centre said, "Look, that member has got his head in the sand. This isn't a priority. He should be thinking about the bigger issues." Well, Speaker, come to the region of Waterloo, and if you're not talking about roundabouts after you leave, then you were probably walking.

I know the member from Kitchener-Waterloo agrees with what I'm saying here. Roundabouts are extremely important. They're an important safety tool, but we need to create some consistent rules on the safety and the use of roundabouts. This was on my mind. I said, "Let's talk about roundabouts and embed them in the Highway Traffic Act with regard to the Safe Schools Act," because a St. Mary's High School student was severely injured when crossing at a roundabout. There are still inconsistencies about how pedestrians and motorists work together in a roundabout.

Unfortunately, that particular amendment was ruled out of order. I asked for it to be brought in and to be considered, which would have simply been done by a unanimous consent motion. Of course, they said no to that. I was fine; we will move on. Hopefully, they get to that at some point during the next year because it is an important initiative in the region of Waterloo.

This particular school bus initiative brought forward by my colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex, Bill 94, was debated and passed unanimously by this Legislature. I brought this forward as an amendment, and I wasn't really sure where we'd go with this, but to my surprise and much to the chagrin of the government, the Chair actually ruled this amendment on school bus blow-bys in order. I was pleasantly surprised and pleased about that, knowing that if we were truly going to talk about school safety, we would have an opportunity to debate this important school safety initiative.

That was despite specific attempts by the member for Kitchener Centre to avoid discussion of the school bus camera amendment. She indicated that, "What Mr. Harris is discussing, school bus cameras, is outside the mandate, outside the scope of this piece of legislation. Therefore, I would recommend that we say that this motion should not be submitted." That's what the member for Kitchener Centre said in committee. She said that this is about school safety; this amendment shouldn't be considered.

Well, I'm pleased to say, Speaker, that the Chair did not share her opinion, noting that, "I did look very, very closely at the scope of the bill, and I found that there are similarities in the technology that is being proposed in this particular bill—the technological advances that have been made. I believe that it's worthy of being discussed here." That was the Chair of the general government committee. Of course, he was right, which begs the question as to why the same Liberal members went on to find

new approaches to ensure they could vote down our motion or amendment.

Speaker, if you allow me, I want to read from a recent article in our local Waterloo Region Record by Luisa D'Amato. She does a great job. Of course, sometimes we're not always in agreement on things, but I think she provides some key insights in her piece titled, "Let's Get Serious With Drivers Who Blow By School Buses."

The article's first line says it all: "It's a shame to see party politics get in the way of making children safer on school buses." I couldn't agree more.

Ms. D'Amato goes on to indicate, "We already know that far too many drivers illegally overtake school buses when they are stopped, with flashing lights and a 'stop' arm extended. This endangers kids getting on and off the bus, especially if they are crossing the street."

"During a 23-day test last year, a private firm that put its traffic cameras on six Waterloo region school buses says it recorded 97 drivers who failed to stop over 23 days." Guys, in a 23-day pilot project, 97 drivers blew by school buses—97.

"The footage is really scary," said Benoit Bourgault, general manager of Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region, which coordinates school buses. "We have an example of a student who was almost hit by a car." Almost hit by a car.

"Usually, the driver gets away with the reckless behaviour. That's because the \$490 ticket can only be issued if the bus driver happens to take down the licence plate number. And bus drivers have many other things to do as they drive the route." Their focus should be on their passengers, ensuring their safety while on the bus and, of course, while getting off. It's not to have a pen and paper writing down the model and make of a vehicle that happens to blow by the bus.

"A camera should be able to store an image of the licence plate and the ticket should be sent in the mail without any human witnesses, just as red-light cameras do."

We said: Look, when a bus is stopped with its red flashing lights on or its safety arm activated, if a vehicle passes a bus or from the rear, if it comes closer than 20 metres, automatic offence. Automatic offence, \$490, admissible in the courts as a stand-alone piece of evidence. Right now, of course, the government will say, "Oh, look, cameras are already used in the courts." Yes, they are, but you have to have a witness, oftentimes the police officer or bus driver—it doesn't really hold up. This is the opportunity.

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But, of course, it's not the law yet. "If it's okay to have photo evidence to convict drivers of running red lights, then it should also be okay to use it to protect our most vulnerable users on the road." Of course, I couldn't agree more.

I want to remind folks of the red-light cameras, another important safety measure on our roads that in fact a Progressive Conservative government adopted, initiated and passed through by law in 1998, with the support of all three political parties. Red-light cameras came in

1998, allowing video camera footage captured from a red-light blow-by to be used as a stand-alone piece of evidence in our courts today. It works great. The city of Toronto administers it with no problems. We said, from 1998 to 2017, let's just modernize our laws to reflect what happened in 1998 by putting it on a school bus.

I'm a father of three; I'm assuming they'll be coming in shortly—

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Little Murphy.

Mr. Michael Harris: My son Murphy is five. He's going to JK at J.W. Gerth school in Kitchener. It's his first year on a school bus. When I'm home on Fridays, I often love to get them on the bus in the morning. It's three to a seat, Speaker, if you can believe that. They're so cute in the morning when they're on the bus. They're looking forward to going to school of course; that's at JK.

At 3:40, I believe, his bus shows up. You know the kids had a long day, but they're greeted by their loved ones, their parents. I know Murphy, when he gets off the bus, if I've got Eliot the dog there with me, he's happy to see us, you know? He's so excited. The last thing he's thinking about is whether that vehicle, when we cross the street, is going to stop or not. That's not even what he's thinking about at five years old. He's probably thinking, "I'm going home to make myself a peanut butter sandwich and watch some Transformers." That's what he's thinking.

But just during the last few weeks, Speaker, we've actually had several incidents, right in our own subdivision by our own neighbours, in fact, who have blown by a school bus, at 3:40 in the afternoon. Some of the concerned parents actually went right over to the neighbour and the vehicle and said, "Do you know what just happened back there?" The neighbour said, "No. What happened?" "Well, you blew by our kids' bus. The lights were on and the arm was out. They were crossing the street, and you kept driving by." She was on her phone—you know, distracted driving.

As I said during debate, we talk about photo radar, and yet the number one thing that kills people on our roads today is distracted driving, and this bill will do nothing to combat distracted driving on our roads.

We've got new legislation legalizing marijuana. We're going to have more impaired drivers on our roads. We already see too many impaired drivers, unfortunately, due to alcohol, substance abuse, opiate-addicted abuse and narcotics. Now, we're going to see marijuana on our roads. Impaired drivers are going to be more common on our roads, sadly. I hope that's not the case, but this bill will do nothing to protect our vulnerable from impaired driving—nothing.

That's why I felt strongly that we should be using this opportunity before us to enhance student safety. That's why we proposed this important amendment. I've seen the need first-hand, of course, as I mentioned. That's why I remain mystified as to why we wouldn't want to take that opportunity we have in front of us to take direct aim at school bus blow-bys.

Again, in Waterloo region alone, we have studies showing that blow-bys are occurring every day at a rate of two per bus—two per bus. In Mississauga, it's two and a half, almost three. And yet, we had Liberal committee members, including the member for Kitchener Centre, denying us this opportunity to actually address it directly.

In fact, the government, through their deputations, invited the company that does these pilot projects for these school bus blow-bys. They actually invited them to be a delegation on this bill. So you've got, at one opportunity, the government inviting a company to talk about school bus blow-bys. They heard the deputation from that company. Then they vigorously debated their own Chair to suggest that my amendment to address this issue should be ruled out of order. We debated it at length, and then they voted against it. That's what they did. So don't tell me that I'm not concerned about, and interested in, school safety, because we darn well are. We felt that this was an important initiative to move forward right now.

I asked the government, "How come you don't see this as a priority right now? Tell me one good reason why this isn't a priority for you." They couldn't; they didn't. They're like, "We're just not sure about the technology and the cameras," blah, blah, blah. That's just a bunch of excuses because it was an idea from an opposition member on this side of the House. The end result? Partisan politics played by the government to not adopt an important safety initiative brought forward by the Ontario PC Party, led by Patrick Brown. That's what that was about.

We heard the reasons that were given: The Highway Traffic Act requires for cameras to show flashing lights. But that's something that we could have also dealt with through amendments. During committee, there's lots of debate and discussion. We hear now about technicalities. We believed the amendment we proposed and asked for unanimous consent on recently would in fact have been the fix the government would adopt. We're talking about photo radar; let's talk about school-bus-camera blow-bys. They said all this nonsense about the technology, but they never, ever, at any time, offered to amend our amendment—never once. Not, "Well, we think you should do this or that." They've got the resources as the government—not once; they never said a word. "We want to amend your amendment to do this or that"—they didn't even want to hear it. They didn't want to hear us.

I did an interview with Luisa D'Amato. I talked about the fact that the government feels that we're a nuisance. I say that I'm doing my job as an opposition member, putting forward additional ideas. Again, the only opportunity we have as an opposition member is during second reading debate and then at committee, during clause-by-clause. That is the opportunity we have. I know the members over there are not used to how the opposition works on this side, but that's how our parliamentary process works. Again, I hope some of them—just a few of them—get that opportunity to actually understand that.

Of course, that said, we do recognize that the minister has written a letter to the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex spelling out a direction towards consultations on

his bill in the summer. We're actually hopeful that something comes out of it.

This fall, there will be photo radar on a side street or on a major road, yet there won't be school bus cameras to capture people who blow by school buses this September. That is a reality: It won't be there. It's because this government stood in the way of that. They stood in the way of that.

I talked about the doubling of penalties in community safety zones. We talked about strong deterrence for school zone speeders, and yet, once again, the government said no. That was, of course, to the doubling of the fines.

On the subject of getting improved road safety and better drivers around our kids, if this bill were truly about making our streets safer and protecting our children, then why did the Liberals not agree to the revenues—and I talked about the revenues from the operation of photo radar systems—going back into other traffic light amendments? Of course, we respect our municipal partners, but all governments need checks and balances to prevent the good intentions of decision-makers from being diverted. Mandating that photo radar fines only be used for traffic safety measures is reasonable and respects the intent of the bill.

Of course, the government will talk about respect for municipalities. I would have actually liked the minister, had he had more time—and he did—to actually give his speech that he was going to give one day on tolls. He was pro-toll at the time, until his Premier told him—or really, until the vigorous cabinet discussion that they were going to lose their seats if they didn't yank the tolls off the table. The Premier said to the municipalities, "We're with you 100%. Just go out and ask for them and we'll give them to you. We respect your ability and your autonomy to make those decisions." She pulled the carpet from underneath them and said, "No, we're not going to give you tolls. Because you know what? We need to save our own political bacon. So no to tolls." Obviously, I'm confused with—we'll talk about municipalities, on one hand, and they take it on the other.

Radar speed signs: I talked about them and the fact that the city of Toronto has a pilot project for these. The purpose of the speed display signs is to display the speed of the vehicle when it enters a school zone. It was initially a pilot program that proved so successful that last June, the city of Toronto council voted to make it a city-wide program that any and every school in the city is eligible to apply for. Due to the high demand for these radar speed signs, the city of Toronto implemented a criterion for eligibility that prioritizes locations with a history of high collision rates, pedestrian injuries and excessive traffic speeds, which are reviewed by qualified traffic engineers, not politicians.

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I commend the local politicians who advocated for the city-wide rollout of this program and their collaboration with the local police, who were able to conduct random enforcement at some of these sites. We want to ensure

that we don't see less actual police enforcement in our subdivisions, in our community zones or in our school zones because of this bill. That has the potential to happen: "Oh, don't worry. We've got a box on a pole somewhere to slow traffic down. It will catch all the bad guys. It will catch all the impaired drivers. It will catch the distracted drivers on their phones. Don't worry, we've got a box to take a photo of your licence plate." That's the fear we have. That's a reality.

There's nothing better that I like to see on a weekend or on a busy morning than a Waterloo region police car outside my subdivision. It's one of the best things I like to see every morning. It's not every morning, of course, but I'll tell you it's something I like to see, knowing that the men and women in blue are out there enforcing on all traffic violations. Distracted driving, impaired driving, aggressive driving: All these things are important to combat.

Back to the signs: I was extremely disappointed that my attempt to raise awareness about speed radars prior to the launch was rejected. Similarly, I proposed an amendment to require educational mailings for first-time speeding offenders in photo radar zones instead of a fine. It was also rejected.

This clearly points to a pattern. You've already heard me pointing out what is the true purpose of Bill 65. We brought forward amendments. In fact, we brought forward an amendment that was identical to theirs, and guess what they did? They said no to ours. Before the small change that they made, this bill would have allowed for photo radar on major expressways and roads. It still is on major roads. We've got a councillor out of Hamilton asking for photo radar to be on the Linc and the Red Hill, 90 km/h. Identify them as community safety zones and you've got photo radar. That's what they wanted.

It was our opposition during second reading debate that told the government they've got to pare that back. That was an objection of ours. You know what? They actually did listen to us. They proposed one amendment that said that photo radar cannot be on highways over 90 km/h. We believe it should be 50 and over. We got a small, little win there. That was through our objection to this bill on second reading that we feel we got that. Had we all held hands and sung Kumbaya, I can guarantee you, that change would never have happened. It would never have happened. But it did, so we're happy about that.

Now, of course a municipal bylaw could pare the speed limit down to 80, and then it would apply, but we don't feel that's the case. You never know. But we said, "No, you've got to fix this. It's one small amendment."

We talked about requiring signage indicating the use of a photo radar system every 100 metres within a school zone, 200 or 500 metres—we believe that signage should be out there for people. It shouldn't be a sneaky way to generate cash. It should be well-signed. We believe that's another important amendment. Of course, the Liberals shot down that amendment. We talked about the proper

signage. It really was unfortunate that the government didn't want to clarify what the parameters for using photo radar were or ensure drivers have fair warning about photo radar.

We talked about no photo radar systems in community safety zones where the speed limit is greater than 50. We feel that that was a major initiative we talked about. We encouraged people to lower their speed to reduce fatalities, improving safety on our roads. But allowing for a blanket, province-wide speed reduction measure will not necessarily result in safer streets. In fact, municipalities already have the ability to lower speed limits. They already have that ability. I proposed an amendment for a clearer definition of a community safety zone as well as a basic set of criteria that must be satisfied by municipalities to meet the warrants for a community safety zone designation, for this to be an effective traffic solution.

After the second reading of the bill, the Liberals responded to the call for a more focused definition of community safety zones by disallowing designating roadways in excess of 80 kilometres as community safety zones. Of course I had mentioned that this was a positive change, but I am disappointed with the lack of consideration given to the consequences of enabling this broad community safety zone shortcut without mandating a minimum requirement for traffic warrants and reasonable evidence.

It's beyond my comprehension why the government rejected my amendment to mandate municipalities to conduct the public consultation, traffic studies and speeding reviews required to meet basic warrants for a community safety zone, to improve safety, and not to impose a false sense of safety.

Municipal councillors do not classify roadways; traffic engineers do. They have the skills and training to make an assessment and provide the evidence to back their recommendations up. Appropriate categorization, classification and grouping of roadways enable safe and efficient use of the roadway for all users and modes of travel. Imposing a broadly defined community safety zone on a six-lane roadway designed to carry high volumes of traffic will not necessarily lead to better safety.

Of course, the government rejected my amendment to have criteria that would filter and prioritize local roadways with higher pedestrian volumes, making virtually any roadway eligible for a community safety zone designation, regardless of what, if any, actual traffic-related problems might exist.

I talked about the fact that we should have Canadian companies if we're going to roll this technology out, to provide that investment, to have it manufactured here. We wanted to ensure that they were properly calibrated.

I do want to get into again how they talked about this bill being about school safety. Speaker, I kind of ask—I know you don't need to respond to me. I remain mystified as to why, instead of implementing strengthened fines in school zones, the bill focuses on things like returning bubbling licence plates. What do bubbling licence plates have to do with ensuring student safety?

Mr. Todd Smith: Nothing.

Mr. Michael Harris: Nothing. This is what the opposition does: bring forward the craziness of what this bill is actually about. They talk about keeping kids safe in school zones; well, then what the heck have bubbling licence plates got to do with it?

As we all know, you only need to go out into a parking lot and look at licence plates. For years now, the government has been aware of the problem with peeling and bubbling licence plates, and they've done nothing to fix the problem, while motorists are left to either pay for a replacement or be hit with a fine. They've actually been fined for the government's inability to manufacture a good licence plate. All they've got to do is figure it out, but they haven't.

I remain concerned that this bill calls for the return of bubbling plates caught by photo radar, with a threat of cancelling the plate for non-compliance. What has that got to do with school safety? Nothing.

My office launched a petition to address the re-occurring problem of bubbling and peeling plates after a constituent contacted me with an admittedly unscientific photo survey of a local parking lot, showing countless examples of peeling plates. When the ministry responded to our complaint on his behalf with a "Too bad, so sad; please pay for a replacement," response, I thought we should be addressing it directly through petitions—available, of course, on my website, michaelharrismpp.ca.

We talked about the fact that the Liberal Wynne government has been aware of these issues for years. Despite government acknowledgement that licence plates and their materials have changed over the years, and claiming to work with the manufacturer to determine the cause, deteriorating plates continue to be an eyesore on vehicles across the province. Of course, vehicle owners face a \$40 fee to replace defective licence plates, and \$99 for personal plate replacements. Of course, if you're out there driving about, you're subject to a \$110 fine for having a damaged plate or a plate that is not plainly visible.

What do bubbling licence plates have to do with school safety? Nothing, but it's in there. It's in the bill. It's all about school safety, but we're talking about bubbling licence plates.

Again, Speaker, we completely support the need for enhanced student safety. We regret the fact that this bill continues to take us in so many other directions that lead away from that shared safety goal.

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That's why we introduced an amendment to put a hold on the bubbling-plate-return directives of this bill until the minister has actually addressed the problem. We said, "Look, you've acknowledged the fact that you make crappy licence plates, and you should fix the problem permanently before you penalize motorists in Ontario with a \$110 fine. Get this right." We proposed an amendment: "Halt your little program until you know you've got a plate that works." Because you know what? In Canada, it's cold. It snows, it rains and the sun shines—we're hoping that that comes sooner rather than

later, but that's what we get. Create a plate that actually holds the kind of weather here in the province, and until you do so, stop with this nonsense. We put an amendment forward to call for that; guess what they did? They said no. They said, "It's about school safety, though. This bubbling plate stuff—it's so important. It's about school safety."

Why should motorists be threatened with plate cancellation replacement fees, when the problem is the government's lack of oversight and due diligence in the first place? Why are we even talking about peeling plates in legislation that purports to be about school safety zones?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: You're talking about it.

Mr. Michael Harris: Because it's in your bill. It's actually in your bill. I can talk about it because it's in the bill. The bill is not long. It talks about school safety, but you prioritize bubbling plates over school bus blow-bys. That's what you do. The government prioritizes bubbling plates, which is actually their own fault—a lack of government oversight. They're going to fine you and make you pay more for a bubbling plate that they couldn't make in the first place, but yet they wouldn't adopt a sound school initiative put forward by my colleague to prevent school bus blow-bys. They said, "No, no. We don't like that one." They said no.

I ask them again: Why is it not a priority to get this done now? The Cambridge Times, just today: "Change Laws to Allow for Greater School Bus Safety." More needs to be done now to penalize dangerous drivers.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We seem to be having across-floor discussion. I don't think that's going to continue, is it? Thanks.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm here now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Yes. So it goes from one, two, three, back to one, two, three, three, two, one. It's a good system, but it's not going to fly.

Continue.

Mr. Michael Harris: Aw, you missed all the good parts.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: All three seconds.

Mr. Michael Harris: I was saying that the bill is supposedly about school safety, children's safety, and yet they say that it's only, what, eight or nine pages? So it's not substantial. I would have thought that for a guy, a first-time minister—his first opportunity to bring forward his own bill and he brings a bill with eight pages.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: We passed Bill 31.

Mr. Michael Harris: Bill 31 was brought forward by the member from Toronto Centre.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: No, it wasn't.

Mr. Michael Harris: Yes, it was. It was introduced first by the member from Toronto Centre.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Harris: Bill 31 was initially introduced by his colleague from Toronto Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm glad you're leaving. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Harris: I was hoping he'd hear how his bill talked about bubbling licence plates and the need to fix that problem, combat that problem, and yet he wouldn't adopt a more pressing priority to keep kids safe, and that's cracking down on school bus blow-bys, put forward by my colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex. Bubbling licence plates over school safety on buses—that's what the government chose. That's what this is about. It really is, Speaker.

I know the member for Niagara Falls will have an opportunity to go next, and he'll ask for two hours. I'd love for the rest of the afternoon to talk about this. But to wrap up my concerns on the Liberals' rejection of every amendment we moved forward—on every amendment we put forward to make this truly about school safety, the government said no. I can't think of an opportunity or a time that I've been in committee as an official opposition critic on any government bill where they have actually adopted any of our ideas. You tell me who doesn't support this initiative to prevent school bus blow-bys.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Harris: No, you don't. We do; you don't. We put it forward, and they said no. They've never adopted anything. It's, "My way or the highway." That's what it is for them. Partisan politics over children's safety: That's what they chose.

Interjection: Four hundred amendments.

Mr. Michael Harris: Oh, so now we're at 400. The member for Cambridge talked about—and I want to get it. The member for Cambridge said that it was 214 amendments; the member for Kitchener Centre, I think, said around 300; now we're at 400. Do we have a 500?

I know they can't do math. I know that. You've got a \$312-billion debt. They didn't balance the budget. I know they can't do math. But go back to Hansard: just over 40 sound school safety initiatives put forward in amendments. They rejected them.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Every one?

Mr. Michael Harris: They rejected every one.

Moving forward to the terminology of automated speed enforcement, it's not in line with the technology the government wants municipalities to start using, it's not in line with the history of this mechanism, and it's not in line with how Ontarians understand this issue. It was a clear attempt to avoid using the language of "photo radar," and to avoid some of the backlash from Ontarians who don't want these photo radar systems implemented. Further, using this open-ended language—"automated speed enforcement"—leaves the floodgates wide open for the government to slip through new technologies without having to go back and consult Ontarians. Of course, we feel that's important. "Photo radar" is clear; it's well known. Ontarians know what to expect when you tell them it's coming back to Ontario, because on Kathleen Wynne's roads and major highways right across the province, photo radar is coming back. Photo radar is back—back like never before. Important school safety initiatives like cameras—they're not going to be here. This fall, this September, they're not going to be back.

I do feel that if this bill moves forward, while we have addressed some key safety concerns at our schools, I regret the fact that the government didn't keep the focus right there on student safety, as the bill title suggests. Of course we, the official opposition, the PC Party, absolutely support safety on our roads. I've got an initiative right now on the order paper: "Slow down, move over," for waste disposal workers and snowplow operators. When their flashing light is on, slow down, move over. These men and women go out every day on the roads and work on our roads, just like emergency service providers do, just like tow truck drivers. Their lives are equally as important as the others'. The roads are their workplace. We believe that that same provision should be extended to them. I proposed that "Slow down, move over" act. Do you know what the government said? "We have actually no intention of moving forward with that." So it's, "We don't care about their lives. We don't care about the lives of waste workers that are on our roadways." They said, "We have no intention."

Again, the Ontario PC Party led by Patrick Brown is absolutely supportive of school safety initiatives. Many of them have been enforced and are on our books because of Conservative governments of the past.

Red-light cameras: I want to talk again about that important school safety initiative, moved forward by my colleague Rick Nicholls and supported by all of you here in this House—at least, all three political parties. It's in committee right now. We had that golden opportunity—a golden opportunity. The Liberal government Chair said, "This actually meets the scope of the bill." The government tried to talk him out of it; they tried to talk him out of even addressing or attempting to debate this important safety initiative. He said, "No. It meets the scope." We had that opportunity to go back and forth. They didn't do it. They said no. I said, "Why isn't this a priority now?" No one has been able to answer me.

If this bill was truly about student safety, they would have adopted our safety measure, but they said no. They said no, and that's unfortunate. It's disappointing, Speaker.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise to add some comments to what the member from Kitchener-Conestoga said about the Safer School Zones Act. I'll be honest: I'm probably not the only one in this room, or anybody who was watching—if they didn't turn it off—who lost track of what the member from Kitchener-Conestoga was talking about for a great period of time, because he wasn't actually talking about the bill before us. I'm going to try and bring his comments back to the actual bill before us.

He talked about how he and his entire caucus, including their leader, certainly support student safety. Really, that's at the heart of this. We have municipalities that are asking for this type of legislation. We have school boards that would welcome this type of legislation in order to be

able to hold people to account—those who choose to speed through school zones and run stop signs, those who put students and education workers and their family members at risk. That really is at the heart of this bill.

I know that the Conservative side, the PCs, are sore right now because they didn't get all of their amendments. I get that. I just want to clarify something, because they're saying they only brought 40 forward, right? There were 300 amendments. I want people back wherever they're watching to know this: They actually brought forward 300 amendments. While 260 of those may have been withdrawn at some point, those are 300 amendments that our party and the Liberal Party and anybody coming to provide a deputation would want to go through and look at and take a great deal of time to understand. Just because they withdrew them—changed their mind and decided it was a bad direction—doesn't mean that they didn't bring them to the committee. Let's be clear on that.

Now, we support the idea of cameras on school buses. But what I would hate to see is the Conservatives not support this bill just because they didn't get their way this time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Are we all done now?

The member from Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the member for Kitchener-Conestoga. Gosh, Speaker, where do I start? He made the remark that what is wrong with this House is the politics people play with these bills. Speaker, was he talking about himself?

Let's just review a few of the facts here. On second reading, he and the PCs voted against Bill 65, a bill intended to keep children and pedestrians safe. In committee, he filibustered. He handed in over 300 motions to obstruct the bill. Then, Speaker, with a Trump-style diversionary tactic, they suddenly tried to deflect to the issue of cameras on school buses, which in principle, I will tell you, we do support.

We supported the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex's PMB; we think it's a good idea. The minister has said he wants to work with you. However, there were two legal experts who came before our committee and they informed us that there are difficulties in capturing the images of the flashing lights on the bus, and that you could not get a conviction from a speeder based on this. This is the technology that needs to be sorted out yet.

I want to remind the member for Kitchener-Conestoga that his own mayor, Berry Vrbanovic, a good friend of his, supports Bill 65. He has told me this. Also, the chief of police in Waterloo region, Bryan Larkin—we've had conversations, and he strongly supports this legislation. So he's out of touch with what his own leadership in his own community are asking for. The PCs know that they're on

the wrong side of this bill. They're scrambling right now, trying to save face in whatever way that they can.

I want to just leave you with a comment that was made by a councillor in Ottawa, Catherine McKenney. She spoke to our committee. She said we have a moral obligation to pass this bill. I would agree with her.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: There was a lot of talk with regard to Bill 94, bringing forward video evidence that would be allowed in a court of law, captured from a school bus while the lights are flashing and the stop arm is extended. That bill was brought forward. We had asked to have that bill inserted as an amendment to Bill 65.

In the course of conversation with regard to hearing from experts from the Ministry of Transportation, they talked about technology and some of the legalities of capturing and proving while lights are flashing. We do know that technology does exist to be able to capture that, so in an effort to let the government know that we were listening, we attempted one more time in committee to bring forward that bill. We had to seek unanimous consent first, but we did have the answers in there. It was flatly refused. They didn't want to listen to us.

Now, with all due credit given to the Minister of Transportation, he did reach out to me and he said, "Rick, we're willing to work with you. We like your Bill 94. We just didn't want to have it put into Bill 65." I get that. Do I like that? Not necessarily, but this is about the safety of children, and with September coming around the corner real fast, we want to ensure—I wanted to ensure—that the public is in fact well educated on the severity of blow-bys and how they are endangering our children's lives.

Having said that, it doesn't look as though Bill 94 will be given the opportunity to have anything done over the summertime to better prepare motorists and protect our children in September.

Again, I am willing to work with the minister on this to make it a stronger bill, a better bill, to keep our kids safe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's always a privilege to get up and to look at the work that has been done by my two colleagues here, trying to make children safe.

I think we've gone the extra mile to try to make this bill safer. We've pointed out that it was a backdoor way of actually putting photo radar in. I know they've done some work as far as dropping the speed limit to 90, but outside of the 401 in my area, all county roads, all expressways are 80 km/h. They would be subject, and I would think that this is pretty well standard across the province.

The minister so very clearly stood up just a few months ago and said that they would not introduce photo radar. Photo radar is photo radar, no matter what you call it. I guess you can call it, for community zones—we asked for a definition that would clarify exactly where it

would be allowed, and this government refused to do that. It really makes you wonder why they would do that, other than it's another tax cash cow.

There's no question this government likes taxes. They've raised their revenue since they came to power; they've more than doubled it.

Interjection.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I heard the member who's chattering across here talk about priorities and how we ask for money to be spent. There's lots of money to be spent in this province because you're collecting double what you picked up when you came to power. It's gone; it's vanished; it's evaporated. You've wasted all that money. All that capital that you've collected, \$65 billion a year, is gone, and you haven't got the results to show for it—no subway stops, nothing completed.

We see a lot of work that could be done, a lot of cleanup to be done in this government. We think that the people of Ontario deserve to be talked to forthright. If you want to use photo radar, introduce it and call it that.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Davenport is really pushing the limit.

The member from Kitchener-Conestoga has two minutes.

Mr. Michael Harris: I appreciate the one hour; I would have loved to have had a second.

I just want to reinforce the fact that the Ontario PCs, all of our caucus here, led by Patrick Brown, are absolutely supportive of school safety initiatives. We brought in many important road safety initiatives over the course of the history of our party. I could spend hours talking about them all.

I do want to reinforce the fact that we wished this bill had truly been about school safety and that petty, partisan politics hadn't been played. Just last week, all of the Ontario PC caucus members received these petty, partisan press releases in ridings, basically misinforming media—and that's really what this is about. That's what their intention is in all of this: to somehow play political games.

I wish that the member for Kitchener Centre—I wish that they would have allotted more time for her today, aside from the two minutes that she got. They left about 40 minutes on the clock. I would have loved to have had her talk more about school safety.

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It really comes down to partisan petty politics, press releases and—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Are we finished?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't want to hear it.

Continue.

Mr. Michael Harris: Bill 65: We wish it had been about school safety—truly about school safety. We made 40-some attempts to actually make the bill about school safety. They

have rejected every one of them, including this important school bus blow-by initiative proposed by us.

Of course, again, the Liberals wanted to make this about politics, putting these press releases into our ridings to try to jack up all of the media. But do you know what they did when they called me? Their intention was, “Well, why didn’t they pass this more important safety initiative on school bus blow-bys?” That’s what they’ve asked me. So keep sending the releases out; I’ll keep talking about what the bill really should be about, and why you didn’t prioritize it. That will be the question. Keep sending them out.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further—

Interjection: Shame on you. Shame. You don’t care about safety.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, here is how it’s going to work now, folks. We’re going to move towards warnings.

Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I’m certainly pleased to rise, but I want to say something before I start. I have a brother, Jimmy Gates, who watches us every day. I’m just saying it’s kind of like his entertainment. He enjoys it. Yesterday I wasn’t in the House for question period. He called me last night and said, “Where were you?” I just want to say to my brother: Thanks for watching us. Maybe we can give him a round of applause for being there and watching us every day. I love my brother, so I thought I’d say that today.

Interjection: What about your sister? She’s probably watching too.

Mr. Wayne Gates: She’s not watching. She is not watching, for sure. My sister is not watching. She loves me, but she’s not watching. So I wanted to do that.

Today I want to say thank you for allowing me to rise to speak on Bill 65, Safer School Zones Act. It’s always great to rise and stand in the House and represent my riding of Niagara Falls, which includes Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and everything in between.

The issue is important. School safety, the safety of our children and our grandchildren, is important. I believe it should be important to all of us. Our children are our most precious resource, and making sure that they are protected is something we should take very seriously. I’m very happy to be able to speak to this bill again today.

As members in this Legislature, it’s pretty easy for us to get lost in the politics of this place. However, this is the type of legislation that should bring us all back to earth and remember one of our most important tasks as legislators: protect our children, our grandchildren, our seniors and our communities.

While I’ll go on today to discuss some of the details of this bill and the wonderful presentations that we received throughout the committee sittings, I really want to stress one point. This bill sets out to protect the public, and ultimately save the lives of our children.

Something that we saw, and I’ll talk about later, has happened all too frequently in Toronto. I don’t know how anyone in this House can’t support that, quite frankly. I’d

like to repeat that: I do not know how anyone in this House does not support that very basic fact. We heard from transportation groups like CAA; city councillors from all over the province, including as far away as Ottawa; traffic safety advocates; school representatives; and, of course, parents and school councils. Their message at the end of the day was clear. This bill will protect the public. It will protect our children.

I’ll add something to that, because as we found out during the presentations around the schools, it would protect our teachers as well.

Some may know, and some may not know, that my wife was a principal. She was a teacher. She retired about a year ago to take care of her dad. I talked to her on this bill because I figured she might know a little more about it than me. She said that every day they’re out there trying to educate the parents and the public on, “Please slow down. These are your kids.” She had near misses through the course of her career—near misses in her school. She never had anybody get hit by a car. She didn’t have anybody get killed, but she had lots of near misses.

One of the first things they talked about when you meet in the school with the parents at the start of the year was this very issue, about driving carefully when you’re dropping off your kids. Don’t rush. Don’t speed. Come there, take your time, make sure the teacher’s safe, make sure the kids are safe, and then go on your way to whatever you’ve got to do. I appreciate that because that’s what she did for 30 years.

Their message at the end of the day was clear: This bill will protect the public, and it will protect our kids. Overall, I understand and support the purpose of this bill: to make our school zones as safe as they possibly can be.

As legislators, we cannot create or, in this case, support good policy if we don’t fully understand how this is going to affect the people this bill is meant to serve. It is the very basis of how good public policy is created.

I have to say, before I move on, that the committee presentation stage for this bill was very impressive. I enjoyed being there. I enjoyed listening to the presenters. I also enjoyed being educated—something I do every day I come here. Almost all the presenters were very informative and were very insightful in their presentations.

This goes back directly to my initial comment on how it can be easy to lose track of the real-life effects bills have on our communities. The presenters allowed us to really understand how this bill would go on to seriously address a problem for many schools in Ontario—and I don’t want to single out just Toronto, but we have had some terrible situations in Toronto and the GTA.

Before I move on to discussing some of the presentations we received, which I feel gave great merit to this piece of legislation, I just want to publicly thank everyone again who took the time to come out to the committee and provide this insight and knowledge on this topic. It was extremely helpful.

As many of you know, I served on city council before I came here. It was a council that functioned very well and one that I was proud to serve on, so I understand the

reasoning behind this move to allow municipalities to make decisions around safety zones. I said this at committee. One of the main roads in Niagara Falls, which isn't that far from where I live, is Kalar Road. There are four schools in that area, three public schools and a high school, and that municipality, the council I was on, talked about the importance of having a community safety zone, a school zone.

What we did was, we lowered the speed limit, and we didn't lower it for half an hour after school or half an hour before school; it was there all the time. Some people will say, "Why would you do that, because the kids are only there from 7 in the morning till 3 in the afternoon or

4 o'clock?" We wanted to make sure that the residents in Niagara Falls who drive that road all the time understand that kids are there after school. They're playing soccer. Daycares are there. We voted to make sure that was a school safety zone, lowered the miles and—I'll finish up tomorrow. Thank you very much, Speaker, for giving me a heads-up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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